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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

ORIGIN OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.







## GARNEY BRIDGE

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HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE  
ORIGIN OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.

BY THE  
✓  
REV. ANDREW THOMSON, B.A.

AND  
THE HISTORY  
OF THE  
RISE OF THE RELIEF CHURCH.

BY THE  
REV. GAVIN STRUTHERS, D.D.

A. FULLARTON AND CO.,  
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## PREFACE.

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THE origin of this volume and of those which are to follow in the series, is connected to a great extent with the recent auspicious union between the United Secession and Relief Churches. It was believed that the ends contemplated by the Union, as well as those of general edification, would be extensively promoted by putting within the reach of the members both of the United Presbyterian and of other churches, historic sketches of the origin of both sections of the united body, in a form so condensed as to be capable of being read by all, and at a price so low as to be capable of being purchased by all. The same ends would be gained by reviving and widely circulating in the same form the early literature of the Secession and Relief Churches. Their history and early literature are to a great extent their Testimony and Defence.

The Historical Sketch of the Origin of the Secession Church which follows, is neither fitted nor designed to supersede more full and elaborate narratives. It is what it professes to be—a sketch—and nothing more. The History by Dr. M'Kerrow is, and must continue to be, the 'Thesaurus' of Secession History. In composing our sketch we have preferred however to draw our information for the most part from earlier documents, and have gone, wherever we could, to the fountain-head. The first two chapters and the greater part of the third were written in the manner we have described; but we have been delighted on comparing our own impressions with those of the Historian of the Secession, to mark the extent and accuracy of his research. For some facts in our third chapter, and for much that is contained in our fourth, we willingly acknowledge our obligations to his able work.

In our account of the Marrow Controversy we have to express ourselves indebted to Brown's 'Gospel Truth,' Robertson's 'History of the Atonement Controversy,' and especially to the

able papers on this subject contained in the 'Christian Instructor,' and bearing the indubitable marks of the pen of Dr. M'Crie; while we have had beside us throughout our whole progress, the various Testimonies and public documents emitted at different periods by the Secession, 'Wilson's Defence of the Reformation Principles of the Church of Scotland,' 'Gib's Display of the Secession Testimonies,' 'Brown (of Haddington's) Historical Account of the Secession,' with the interesting MS. volume by Mr. Brown of which the former is an abstract; 'Struthers' History of Scotland,' 'Frazer's Memoirs of Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine,' 'Ferrier's Memoir of William Wilson of Perth;' certain papers of much judgment and ability regarding the Secession and its Founders that are contained in the 'Christian Repository' and 'Christian Monitor;' 'Address on the Causes of the Secession, by the Rev. Andrew Sommerville,' and many other works to which reference is made in the notes appended to the narrative.

We have written these pages under the strong conviction, that the cause and the persons of whom they principally treat deserve to be better known, that the interests of religion and of religious liberty would largely gain by a more extensive knowledge and just appreciation of the men and their measures; indeed, that there are no men since the days of Knox to whom Scotland owes more than the Erskines and their associates.

We are not aware of any unfounded statement or illiberal sentiment contained in our narrative, but writing under the impressions we have described, we must confess to *party preferences*, though we do not confess to *party prejudices*.

A. T.

# HISTORICAL SKETCH

## OF THE

# ORIGIN OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### CAUSES OF THE SECESSION.

The Scottish Church at the Revolution—Defects in Revolution—Settlement—William of Orange—Episcopal incumbents admitted—Burnet's description of them—Queen Anne—Abjuration-Oath—PATRONAGE—Opposition to it—Insinuates itself by degrees—FIRST PROCESS AGAINST PROFESSOR SIMSON—The Auchterarder proposition—'MARROW OF MODERN DIVINITY'—Imprimatur of Westminster Assembly—Publication of 'Marrow' in Scotland—Boston—Hog—Marrow Controversy begins—Committee for purity of doctrine—General Assembly condemns the Marrow—The people—Representation by the Twelve Marrowmen—Debates in Commission—The Twelve Queries—Final sentence regarding the Marrow—The Marrowmen rebuked—Kid of Queensferry—Prohibition resisted—The Anti-Marrowmen—SECOND PROCESS AGAINST PROFESSOR SIMSON—Boston's dissent—Professor Campbell of St. Andrews—PATRONAGE IN SOME OF ITS RIPENED FRUITS—Scene at Bathgate—A mourner in Zion—Corruption exposed—The Rulers impatient—New blows against constitutional rights and the people's liberties—REFUSAL TO MARK REASONS OF DISSENT—OBNOXIOUS OVERTURE of 1732—Ebenezer Erskine—Refusal to receive representations and petitions—Embers of liberty ready to expire—A crisis—Is there no one prepared to be a deliverer?

WHILE there is one great general commission which God has intrusted to the One church in all its sections, it is easy to conceive that to some of those sections there shall be committed the assertion of some dishonoured truth, or the guardianship of some violated right, which it has evidently been called into separate existence to vindicate. There will thus be its general commission and its denomi-

national commission,—the former of which is to be learned from the Word of God, the latter from its own history.

A concise and candid narration of the circumstances in which the Secession Church arose, will thus serve to exhibit the special commission which Providence put into her hands; a description of the characters of those who were the chief actors in the movement, will powerfully contribute to those great moral ends which are ever gained by the contemplation of high-toned principle and sublime self-denial; while looking back upon it from the distance of more than a hundred years, and beholding it in its consequences direct and indirect, immediate and remote, we shall have the means of judging whether it was of that insignificant nature in which a dishonest fear or a reckless partisanship has often sought to describe it, or whether it ought not to be reckoned among the most important and beneficial events in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland. Such a narration it shall be our endeavour to afford in the following pages.

The seeds from which the Secession eventually grew, began to be sown almost at the period of the Revolution-settlement; and it is at this point that all who would understand the subject must begin their investigations.

The people of Scotland—1688—had just emerged from a persecution of nearly thirty years, during which every expedient of tyranny,—fine and imprisonment, confiscation and banishment, torture and death, had been employed to break the spirit of the nation, to weaken its strength, and to impose upon the people a faith and a polity which they abhorred. At the time when the once flourishing church of France was desolated and scattered by the perfidious revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and popish confederacies were plotting the ruin of other protestant churches on the Continent, William prince of Orange had ascended by bloodless steps to the throne of the three kingdoms, and restored the long violated rights of the people. Presbyterianism had been established, her Confession of Faith ratified, and prelacy denuded of all her peculiar immunities, as contrary to the inclination of the generality of the peo-

ple, ever since the Reformation,—‘they having reformed from popery by presbyters.’

To a people whose faith had been held at the risk of life, and at the expense of the best blood of the land, this appeared a deliverance ‘most seasonable as to the juncture, and surprising as to the manner, in which it was given.’ Thousands looked upward to the throne of Him ‘who setteth up kings,’ with the adoring acknowledgment,—‘Neither was it our own sword or our own bow: but the right hand of the Lord and his holy arm that wrought salvation for us.’

It has often been remarked, however, by those who have looked closely into this period of Scottish history, that their ecclesiastical liberties and independence were surrounded by very imperfect guards, and that at a time when such a bold assertion of their rights as they had sometimes made in less favourable circumstances, would have been sufficient to secure them, they spoke out timidly and faintly.

And it was not long ere William made it evident, that he was not disposed to recognise what the church had only faintly asserted. Indeed, though a friend to religious liberty, he either imperfectly understood those opinions respecting the intrinsic power of the church, for which she had often contended and suffered, or was little disposed to respect them, when they interfered with his own political designs.

He saw the hierarchy of England indignant at the recent subjection of prelacy in Scotland; the adherents of prelacy in Scotland itself, though not numerous, were troublesome and disaffected; and to conciliate both, we find him strongly urging upon the General Assembly, the adoption of such measures as would favour the reception of curates or Episcopalian incumbents into the communion and ministry of the Presbyterian establishment, upon easy terms. When we consider the hostility of these men to Presbytery, their approval of the recent persecutions, in which it is not improbable that many of them had personally

shared, the suspected error of some of them in doctrine, and the certain immorality of others, we cannot wonder that the proposal was resisted with indignation and alarm. It was so resisted by the more zealous and staunch Presbyterians. To overcome this resistance, the authority of Parliament was next invoked, which passed an Act declaring that such of the curates as offered to subscribe the Confession of Faith, to submit to the Presbyterian government, and against whom no scandal could be proved for thirty days, should be maintained in the possession of their stipends as parochial ministers. Still the proposal continued to be rejected by repeated Assemblies, which were dissolved or prorogued in consequence by royal authority, until at length the opposition was overcome, and the first heavy blow inflicted upon the Scottish Church, since the Revolution.

To form a just estimate of the injurious effects of this measure, we must not look at its mere general features of oppression and intrusion. The injury would not have been irremediable, had these men, though preferring another form of ecclesiastical polity, been possessed of the more important qualities of evangelical sentiment, blameless deportment, and earnest spirit. But the description given of them by Bishop Burnet is drawn in the darkest colours. 'They were,' says he, 'the worst preachers I ever heard; they were ignorant to a reproach, and many of them were openly vicious. They were a disgrace to their orders, and were indeed the dregs and the refuse of the northern parts. Those of them that rose above contempt and scandal, were men of such violent tempers, that they were as much hated as the others were despised.'\*

Surely the recognition of such worthless men, deserved to be resisted with all the stern and immoveable resolute-

\* Burnet's History of His Own Times, I., 158. We have seen a volume of sermons in manuscript by one of these indulged curates, which inclines us, in his case at least, a little to modify the Bishop's description.



ness of earlier times. It is to be remembered, however, that only sixty of the old ejected ministers were alive at the Revolution; these, hoary with age and prematurely weakened by years of exposure and suffering, would rapidly pass from the scene, while those who succeeded them, inheriting less of their high-toned independence, were gradually induced to yield a reluctant consent to the wishes of government. In course of time, the numbers thus admitted to the functions of the ministry and to the cure of parishes, might be counted by hundreds, and the Assembly, which, near the close of the previous century, had been found offering so decided a front of opposition to the measure as to provoke repeated prorogations, had become so pliant in its spirit in 1712 as to address Queen Anne in the following words:—‘ We cannot but lay before your Majesty this pregnant instance of our moderation,—that since our late happy establishment, there have been taken in and continued, hundreds of dissenting (*i. e.* Episcopal) ministers, upon the easiest terms.’ During the same period, a similar process of deterioration had been going on in the ranks of the eldership, and many individuals who had taken an active share in the scenes of persecution and whose hands were stained with the blood of the saints, were admitted, without acknowledgment of their crimes, to sit in the seats of the elders in her supreme courts, swaying the counsels and influencing the destinies of a church, which they had done all in their power to prostrate. The consequences might easily be foreseen. Two parties from this time appeared in the church, the one preaching the doctrines of her Confessions and discharging with assiduity the duties of the pastorate; the other latitudinarian in doctrine and earthly in spirit,—the one guarding with anxiety the liberty and independence of the church, against the dictation of civil power; the other seeking the favour of the court and pliant to its wishes. This latter party by degrees became dominant in the counsels of the church, and under their malign influence we have now to follow the church in her various steps of degradation and

defection, until wounded consciences found relief, and the people's liberties an asylum, in the First Secession.

The next public events tending further to promote the degradation and defection of the Scottish Church, stand connected with the accession of Queen Anne (1702) to the throne. Even the Union of the two kingdoms, which took place in the earlier part of her reign, and which has been productive to Scotland of such varied and permanent advantage, was not without injurious influences upon her ecclesiastical liberties. With the abolition of the Scottish Parliament which was consequent on the Union, her protection was transferred to the hands of English statesmen, who regarded her popular constitution with no favourable eye; and looking at her from beside the English Church, in which the royal supremacy was undisputed, were desirous of assimilating her as nearly as possible to that Erastian model. The dispositions of Anne and of her advisers, harmonised with these tendencies. One of her first acts on ascending the throne had been to dissolve the Supreme Court of the Scottish Church, when it was deliberating on an Act declaring Christ to be sole Head of the church. And this ominous commencement was followed not long afterwards by two acts passed in the same year, both tending to distract the counsels and to violate the liberties of the church,—the one imposing upon ministers the oath of Abjuration, the other wresting from the people the right of electing their own ministers, and commonly known as the law of patronage.

The former of these, *the Oath of Abjuration*, was received with well-grounded suspicion. The dark shadows and gloomy remembrances of the persecuting times, still fell upon the spirits of not a few of her best ministers; and they well knew how often the imposing of entangling oaths, had proved among the most subtle and efficient instruments of unprincipled and oppressive rulers. This suspicion was increased by the consideration that if all that was sought by its imposition was to secure their loyalty, this purpose had already been secured by the oaths



of allegiance and assurance; and the oath itself was so constructed as to involve the swearer in the approbation of an English act of parliament, which provided that the successor to the crown should always be of the Episcopal communion. The last days of the holy Halyburton at St. Andrews, show us with what suspicion and sorrow it was regarded by her best ministers; and how clearly he foresaw that it would prove an element of division and a source of weakness even among them.\* At first it was generally refused, except by the court-party in the church, who defended it from the first. In course of time, after undergoing various modifications, it was more extensively taken; but there were those who, like Boston, were content to run all hazards, and even suffer joyfully the spoiling of their goods, rather than do violence to the convictions of conscience. 'I was made to cry out,' writes one in his Diary, referring to the ejection and fines which he anticipated as the penalty of his refusing to take the oath,—'O Lord, my worldly enjoyments, my soul, my body, my heart's blood are at thy service. I would reckon it my glory, my crown, to go to a stake, a cross, a fire, or a gibbet, for thee. I am content to be hanged, beheaded, quartered, for thee; if thy cause require it, and if thou wilt bear me through, and be with me.'† These sentences disclose the secret mental exercises of Ebenezer Erskine, of Portmoak, in 1712. Was he now unconsciously educating for that future service, to which he was at length to be called forth?

But by making manifest to the government the servility of the court-party, by supplying an opportunity of suspending heavy penalties over the heads of those ministers who were most devoted to the independence and purity of the church, and even introducing the seeds of alienation

\* Halyburton's Memoirs, p. 239.

† Fraser's Life and Diary of the Rev. E. Erskine, p. 221. The penalty threatened against all who should refuse to take the Oath, was expulsion from their churches and 'an exorbitant fine of £500 sterling.' Boston's Memoirs, p. 275.

among the popular party themselves, the Abjuration-oath had probably served the chief purposes for which it was imposed. It was some consolation to the non-jurants, that they were supported in their steadfastness by the general voice of the people, who, looking upon the oath as a badge of slavery, admired the courage of those who had resisted its imposition, and, deserting the jurants, crowded from all parts of the country to attend on their ministry.

But the restoration of the *Law of patronage* in the same year that saw the Abjuration-oath imposed, struck a yet heavier blow at the liberty and purity of the church. In her best times, the right of voting in the election of persons to ecclesiastical functions had been claimed by the Christian people as their inalienable right, and yielded to them by the state. 'None might be intruded upon any congregation, either by the prince, or any inferior person, without lawful election and the assent of the people over whom the person is placed; as the practice of the apostolical and primitive kirk, and good order craved.' Such were the words of the Second Book of Discipline, and the rights claimed had been fully recognised in the constitution given to the church at the Revolution-settlement. The year 1712 saw this right wrested from the people, and the most efficient instrumentality introduced for the secularising and enslavement of the church. That this was the design of the government in restoring patronage, cannot be doubted. So long as the choice of the Christian people was recognised as an essential element in the election of their pastors, the sympathy between the people and those pastors was likely to be great, the political leanings of the church would be liberal, and the influence of the government over the decisions and the policy of her ecclesiastical assemblies, uncertain and imperfect. But let the nomination of her clergy be in the hands of the crown and of the aristocracy, and they have the power of assimilating the church to their own will, and by making her pastors dependent, making them subservient and secular. The

voice of civil power heard within a church dictating her ecclesiastical arrangements, is the sure signal that she is enslaved. The best securities against corruption are gone, the moment the people have lost their liberty to choose their teachers, and her courts the power freely to administer her laws.

The Assembly foresaw the injuries which this measure was to inflict, and by her Commission represented to parliament that the act was calculated to 'inevitably obstruct the work of the gospel, and create great disorder and disquiet in this church and land,'—words which when read in the light of the next century, which record three secessions from her ranks, seem almost prophetic in their import, and which in all likelihood when read in the light of another century, after so many thousands have been led by experience to ponder the problem whether it is possible for a church to be established and yet remain untrammelled, are likely to appear more significant and prophetic still.

At first the evils of patronage were not felt, because persons when presented to livings refused to accept them, when not accompanied by the call of the people. But this scrupulosity, as we shall find, was short-lived. In a few years the doctrine was boldly proclaimed, that the presentation of the patron was sufficient ground for inducting the presentee; the judicatories of the church were to be found here and there succumbing and lending themselves as instruments in effecting settlements opposed to the wishes of the people; and where presbyteries, retaining their attachment to rights which they believed to involve the highest interests of the church, had dignity and firmness enough to respect the feelings of the people, the Commission of Assembly, which contained a large infusion of patrons and of the friends of patrons, was always ready to step into the place of the presbytery, and, in the face of appeals and remonstrances from an oppressed and insulted people, to force on the most violent settlements. Who can wonder that

the operation of such a system in combination with those other unfriendly influences we have described, was rapid and ruinous. We have seen men of an alien-spirit admitted into the bosom of the church, soon after the Revolution-settlement,—we have seen the frowns of the court ever resting upon the ministers of earnest spirit and friendly to popular rights, and withering the energies of those of feeble principle; and now that the vacant charges, as they occur, are filled up by men that are agreeable to the taste and obsequious to the wishes of patrons, rather than because they are the choice of the Christian people, what is to be expected but that the general character of the church should soon be deteriorated and secularised. It was only the natural effect of such vitiating influences. Nor had the friends of the church long to wait for unequivocal evidence that this was the case. Both in the feeble condemnation of ruinous errors, and in the severe reprobation of precious truths, evidence was given that carried alarm and sorrow into every faithful bosom in her fellowship, that the church had ‘left her first love,’ and that, under the blight of heresy and earthly feeling, the bloom and beauty of her early youth were fast fading away.

The issue of the *first process against Mr. Simson*, professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, in the Assembly of 1717, was the first event that discovered to the friends of the Church of Scotland how far the corrupting leaven that we have seen introduced into the midst of her, had destroyed her fidelity and changed her spirit. There are grounds for thinking that the writings of such men as Archbishop Tillotson, which however elegant as compositions and correct as statements of moral duty, deal but sparingly in those great truths which are at once the glory of the Christian revelation and the instruments of our moral transformation, had found their way into Scotland very early in the eighteenth century, and that the legal and unevangelical strain of preaching which they exemplify, had become fashionable in many of the pulpits of the land. The influences we have already

described encouraged these tendencies, and it is not to be wondered at that men of this class, should have been preferred by patrons to a more faithful and fervent ministry. We doubt, however, whether the result in the case of Professor Simson, did not exceed the fears even of the most vigilant and desponding. Thoughtful men must indeed have been disturbed with uneasy forebodings, when they marked how the ecclesiastical leaders discouraged enquiry and prosecution, and in the face of universal report charging one of the teachers of the rising ministry with the most dangerous errors, left the enquiry to be prosecuted by Mr. Webster, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, at his own charge, and on his own responsibility.

But if the introduction of the process was thus fitted to give alarm, still more was its issue. It appeared in evidence that Professor Simson taught such unscriptural tenets as the following:—‘That heathens have an obscure objective discovery of redemption through Christ; that the light of nature, including tradition, is sufficient to teach men the way of salvation; that the souls of children are as pure and holy as the soul of Adam was in his original condition, being inferior to him only as to those qualifications and habits which he received as being created in a state of maturity; that no proper covenant of works was made with Adam as the representative of his posterity; that our own happiness ought to be our chief end in the service of God; that there is no immediate precourse of God attending and influencing the acts of his reasonable creatures; and that there will be no sinning in hell after the last judgment.’\* In these propositions it is easy to trace some of the worst and most characteristic errors of Pelagianism; errors that reach to the very foundations of revealed truth. Did not the General Assembly then brand them with its most unequivocal condemnation? Did it not censure their author, and drive him from a position in which he had been industriously poisoning the very fountain-heads of

\* Brown of Haddington's Historical Account, pp. 18, 19. and Answers to Mr. Webster's Libel.

the church's purity? No ecclesiastical penalty was inflicted, or formal censure uttered, or error explicitly condemned! The Assembly thought it sufficient to declare that 'some of his opinions were not evidently founded on the word of God, or necessary to be taught in divinity,—that he had used some expressions which bear, and are used by adversaries in a bad and unsound sense, and for answering the objections of adversaries, had employed some hypotheses that tend to attribute too much to natural reason and the power of corrupt nature, which expressions and hypotheses they prohibited him from using in future.' And the Pelagian Professor was permitted to retain his chair. Such an issue was significant. Error may arise in the purest church; the proper test of its general condition is, how does it treat the error when it appears? To describe the sentence of the Assembly as a mere act of ill-judged lenity, is to misunderstand its character. To speak thus softly of errors, proved a secret sympathy with them; and it ought to be remembered that the sentence did not find Professor Simson innocent, but his errors almost harmless. Such a decision might well be regarded as an acquittal, if not a triumph. That it was so regarded appears from the fact, that in a few years he was again before the Assembly, and his earlier errors found to have matured into full-blown heresies of a far deeper dye.

But the issue of the process against Professor Simson, was not the only act of the Assembly of 1717, that awakened serious alarm among the most faithful ministers and attached friends of the Scottish Church. They must have noticed an ominous consistency in the fact, that while the Assembly refused to place the brand of their disapprobation upon the undisguised Pelagianism of Simson, they were not slow to place it upon a precious gospel truth. The *Presbytery of Auchterarder* had 'recently inserted in their minutes the following proposition—'That it is not sound and orthodox to teach, that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God.' A young man on trials for license tinged



with the errors of the times, had favoured the sentiment that we must save ourselves from the love, power and, practice of sin before we come to Christ as a Saviour,—a sentiment most natural to the self-righteous heart, but directly opposed to every line of apostolic teaching, and to the very essence of the gospel. For, as one of the faithful witnesses of those times remarked, ‘Never will you forsake sin evangelically till once Christ come to you, and you come to him; when Christ comes into the temple, He drives out all the buyers and sellers; therefore let Him in, and He will make the house clean.’ Thus spake Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline,\* referring to the proposition of this presbytery which had so faithfully ‘set itself for the defence of the truth.’ But the General Assembly condemned the proposition as ‘unsound’ and ‘detestable,’ and treated the presbytery itself with indignant severity.

The enlightened friends of the gospel in the church, were at length completely aroused. They had seen the Assembly in their lenient sentence in the case of Simson, virtually throw their shield around the head of error; and now, by wounds inflicted by that same Assembly, ‘truth lay bleeding in the streets.’ Silence in matters of personal injury may often be a seemingly Christian forbearance, in the case of injured truth it becomes cowardice and treachery. Earnest consultations were held about the best means of stemming the tide of defection. The publication of old works written in an evangelical strain was suggested, as one of the best expedients for this purpose, because ‘combining the greatest efficiency with the least offence;’ and this suggestion, which was favourably entertained, led to the first publication of the ‘*Marrow of Modern Divinity*’ in Scotland.†

\* Sermons, quoted in Brown’s Gospel Truth, p. 6.

† The publication of works by old authors, was a resource not peculiar to this crisis. The student of Ecclesiastical History, may perhaps recall to mind Calvin’s Commentary on ‘Seneca de Clementia,’ which appeared at an early period in the struggles of the Reformed Church in France, and was designed as a check upon tyrannical power. Sentiments were borne with in Seneca that, if put forth by Calvin alone, would have drawn down upon him the royal vengeance.

The deep interest which the appearance of this work soon excited among the people,—the important religious controversy which it occasioned,—the representations of which it afforded matter in successive Assemblies,—its inestimable value as a means of retaining thousands of the people in the knowledge of a free and unfettered gospel, when the majority of those, who were set for its defence, had sought to betray and bind it,—the impress which the work has left upon our religious literature, as well as the intimate connexion of the controversies regarding it with the rise of the Secession, will not only excuse but require our entering into a few details respecting the character of the volume, as well as of the way in which it was dragged from comparative obscurity, and thrown at so seasonable a juncture upon the Scottish mind.

The 'Marrow of Modern Divinity' was the production of Mr. Edward Fisher, a gentleman commoner of Brazen-Nose College, Oxford, distinguished among his contemporaries for his extensive and accurate scholarship. It consists to a great extent of quotations from the writings of Luther and other divines of the Reformation, chiefly illustrative of those two points which form the theme of the greatest of the inspired epistles,—the gospel method of justification and of sanctification. These quotations are presented in the lively form of a dialogue between Evangelista, a minister of the gospel, Nomista, a legalist, Antinomista, an Antinomian, and Neophytus, a young Christian,—the first of these being the party to whom the other three interlocutors refer their differences and difficulties, and who is to be understood as expressing the sentiments of the author.

Joseph Caryl, the well-known commentator on Job, was appointed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines to revise and approve of theological works for the press; and in 1646, while that eminent Assembly was holding its sittings, it first appeared with his note of license, in which were the following words, 'I allow it to be printed, and recommend it to the readers, as a discourse stored with



many necessary and seasonable truths, confirmed by scripture, and avowed by many approved writers.' Subsequent editions appeared with the strong recommendations of other Westminster divines, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, William Strong, and others; and stray copies having early found their way into Scotland, such was the eager avidity with which it was sought after and read, especially in the times of persecution, that it was no uncommon thing for persons to employ themselves in transcribing the whole or even parts of the book, and for manuscript copies of it to be circulated far and wide, especially in the suffering districts. Latterly, however, it appears to have been comparatively unknown in Scotland, and an account of the chain of events by which it was once more brought into notice, affords an interesting illustration of those little providences and seeming casualties, by which the wisdom of God has so often wrought out the most beneficent results for the church and the world.

A pious soldier coming into Scotland about the close of the seventeenth century, had brought with him a copy of the 'Marrow,' and left it in a small farmhouse in the parish of Simprin, Berwickshire. Thomas Boston, then a young minister, had recently entered on the pastorate of Simprin, and performing his pastoral visits, in which throughout life he displayed a most exemplary diligence, he chanced to visit this farmhouse. Two old books attracted his notice—'Christ's blood flowing freely,' by Saltmarsh, and the 'Marrow of Modern Divinity.' The former of these he laid aside on discovering its Antinomian bias, but the Marrow charmed him with its sweet evangelical strain, and the perusal of it marked a most important era in his spiritual life. In very early youth Boston had experienced the great change afterwards so beautifully described in his 'Fourfold State,' under the preaching of the venerable Henry Erskine, in a barnhouse at Revelaw; and even the icy and flooded waters of the Blackadder, had not prevented him from hastening alone in the very depths of winter, to hear that servant of God

preach. But up to the time of his reading the 'Marrow,' he had felt himself under restraint and impediment through imperfect views of the gospel, and to this volume he ascribed his emancipation from these restraints, his perception of the gospel in its full-orbed glory, and the liberty which he henceforth felt to proclaim the free and unrestricted access of all sinners to Christ as a Saviour. It was natural that a book thus intimately associated with the history of his own inward life, should be remembered by him with peculiar interest ever afterwards.\*

About seventeen years after this, Boston, now become minister of the beautiful district of Ettrick, sitting in the Assembly house immediately after the condemnation of the Auchterarder proposition and conversing with Mr. Drummond of Crieff, was led to refer to the 'Marrow,' and to recommend it to the perusal of his friend. Pleased with the volume, Mr. Drummond recommended it to others, and the result, after the consultations to which we have already referred, was its publication in the year 1718, with a recommendatory preface by one of the most learned and pious ministers of the times—Mr. Hog of Carnock. When the enemy was coming in like a flood, this was the standard which was lifted up against him.

Thrown at such a juncture upon the Scottish mind, the 'Marrow' told with powerful but varied effect. By some it was read with satisfaction as reflecting in clear and energetic language their own views of gospel truth, steering with masterly skill the intricate passage between Antinomian and Arminian error, and fragrant with those sweet evangelic odours which refresh the soul. By others it was received with sentiments of deep and undisguised displeasure, as opposed to all their theological notions; and these happened, in some instances, to be the most unscrupulous ecclesiastical managers and influential men in the church.

\* The celebrated George Whitefield appears to have received similar advantage from the perusal of the Marrow. We find Mr. Ralph Erskine congratulating him on this circumstance in a letter, —'I am glad the Marrow of Modern Divinity has been helpful to you, as it has been to many.'

It was easy to forecast what would follow. The ripple was already on the wave, which precedes and portends the storm.

Mr. Hog saw this, and if possible still to stay the rising tempest, published early in 1719 'An explanation of the passages excepted against in the Marrow of Modern Divinity.' But the contest was one, not of mere dry dogmas, but of deep convictions and religious feelings, and the explanation served but little to repress growing animosities. The sermon of Principal Hadow of St. Andrews, preached at the opening of the Synod of Fife on the 7th of April 1719, which was principally directed against the 'Marrow,' was the first circumstance formally to introduce the matter into the ecclesiastical courts. The majority of the Synod sympathising with his views, immediately requested him to publish it. A controversy ensued which waged through the following four years, drawing into the field a host of controversialists on both sides, in the midst of which there appeared on the side of the 'Marrow' the profound theological genius of Riccaltoun.

In the General Assembly of 1719 which met in May, the 'Marrow' was not named; but such instructions were given to the Commission as proved that it was present to the minds of its members, implied a condemnation which it was not yet felt expedient to express, and prepared the way for the dragging of itself and its friends at an early period before the supreme ecclesiastical tribunal. It was instructed to 'inquire into the publishing and spreading of books and pamphlets tending to the diffusing of that condemned proposition, (that of the Auchterarder Presbytery,) and promoting a scheme of opinions relative thereto, which are inconsistent with our Confession of Faith; and that the recommenders of such books and pamphlets, or the errors therein contained, whether by write or print, be called before them to answer for their conduct in such recommendations; and the Commission are empowered to judge, in cases of doctrine that shall be brought before them, by appeals or references from Synods or Presbyte-

ries.' There was no lack of zeal on the part of the Commission in following out these instructions. A Committee was appointed under the high-sounding name of the 'Committee for purity of doctrine,' which in its turn appointed a Sub-committee to 'ripen the affair,' by fixing on the works to be condemned, naming the persons to be summoned for examination, and preparing the interrogatories that were to be addressed to them.

Principal Hadow was the soul and centre of this Sub-committee, and as it was known to many, that personal animosity joined with controversial rancour to whet his zeal against the venerable recommender of the Marrow, there was little difficulty in guessing either the parties or the writings, against which the enginery of the Committee would speedily be turned.

Little time indeed was left for guessing. In the course of the year, four ministers were brought before the Committee for examination, Messrs. Warden of Gargunnoch, Brisbane of Stirling, Hamilton of Airth, and Hog of Carnock. The explanations and defences given by these brethren seemed to have so far soothed and satisfied the Committee, and many who had taken no active part in the controversy, but had kept watching its progress with profound anxiety, began to hope that all judicial proceedings would now be stopped. But that point was passed, at which controversy could be stayed. While the Committee at Edinburgh seemed to have all but succeeded in extinguishing the fire, it was smouldering in provincial presbyteries and synods, instruments were found ready to send up injurious reports and complaints to the Committee at St. Andrews, and that Committee with its indignant head was not slow to fan the flame. The consequence was, that men looked forward to the coming Assembly with trembling interest, as likely to prove the crisis of this great controversy, and the fall or triumph of that truth which it involved. The Assembly came,—the Committee reported, and the worst fears of its best friends were realised.

The Committee for purity of doctrine gave in a report

in the form of an overture, containing some propositions that were represented to have been collected from the 'Marrow,' and 'which appeared contrary to the Scriptures and Confession of Faith;' and these were accompanied with some expressions culled from the same book, that were declared by the Committee to be 'exceeding harsh and offensive, passing many others that were exceptionable.' The condemned passages were arranged under five heads. 1st. The nature of faith,—under which the charge is, that assurance is declared to be of the essence of faith. 2d. Of universal atonement and pardon. 3d. Holiness not necessary to salvation. 4th. Fear of punishment and hope of reward, not allowed to be motives of a believer's obedience. 5th. That a believer is not under the law, as a rule of life. To these were added certain expressions styled Antinomian paradoxes, of which the following are a specimen:—A believer is not under the law, but is wholly delivered from it. A believer doth not commit sin. The Lord can see no sin in a believer.

The passages extracted under these five heads, were so ingeniously placed and perversely withdrawn from their connection, as to convey the most incorrect and injurious ideas both in reference to the 'Marrow' and its friends. For, an examination of the general strain of the book, as well as of the parts from which the condemned propositions are excerpted, makes it evident, that its real teaching under those five heads, instead of embodying some of the most heretical and startling dogmas, conveyed such wholesome and evangelical truths as the following:—That all who hear the gospel are warranted to believe it; that faith in Christ encourages immediate access with confidence into the presence of God, and the immediate hope of salvation; that God, in the gift of his Son, has brought mercy near to every man; that holiness, while absolutely necessary, is in no sense the price or condition of salvation; that believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, in respect either of its promise, precept, or penalty, and that the law as a covenant of works, is wholly distinct from the law as a



rule of life.—As for the so-called Antinomian paradoxes, they might have been vindicated to a protestant assembly by their resemblance to those bold propositions which Luther nailed on the door of the church at Wittenburg, and which struck the first death knell of popery in Europe; a higher defence might have been pleaded still, that some of them are expressed in the very words of the Holy Ghost.

It was in vain that Mr. Hog of Carnock and others argued the unfairness of judging of the general strain of a book by such fragmentary portions as the Committee had presented to the Assembly, insisted that even admitting that a few injudicious phrases and paradoxical expressions might be found in the book, the same might be affirmed of 'authors of uncontested orthodoxy and eminence, both old and late, whose excellent meaning had hitherto procured an overlooking of such flights,' and invited a comparison of the passages excepted against, with others in which the errors condemned were rejected by the author. The Assembly was in no mood to listen to such reasonable demands, but refusing to look beyond the passages presented by the Committee, found as follows:—  
'That the said passages and quotations which relate to the five several heads of doctrine above mentioned, are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, our Confession of Faith and catechisms; and that the distinction of the law as it is the law of works and as it is the law of Christ, as the author applies it in order to sense and defend the six Antinomian paradoxes above written, is altogether groundless; and that the other expressions above set down, excerpted out of the said book, are exceeding harsh and offensive. And therefore the General Assembly do hereby strictly prohibit and discharge all the ministers of this church, either by preaching, writing, or printing, to recommend the said book, or in discourse to say anything in favours of it; but on the contrary, they are hereby enjoined and required to warn and exhort their people in whose hands the said book is, or may come, not to read or use the same.'

A prohibition so sweeping and stringent would have more beseeemed that Church which boasts its Index Expurgatorius, and 'hates the light, neither cometh to the light, lest its deeds should be made manifest;' and when we think that the work thus condemned and prohibited contained so much of the marrow of revealed and gospel truth,—'the concurring suffrages of burning and shining lights, some of whom were honoured to do eminent and heroical services in their day,'\*—it is impossible not to characterize this act as a most flagrant instance of the 'rulers dealing treacherously,' a 'wounding of Christ in the house of his friends.' It was an hour when those who were right-hearted men in Zion, were ready to clothe themselves in sackcloth, and hang their harps on the willows. 'I would not,' said one minister on hearing of the Assembly's decision,—'I would not for ten thousand worlds have been a *yea* in the passing of that Act.'†

But, happily for the church and the world, acts of tyranny like this, often defeat themselves. The very prohibition of the Assembly, inflamed the curiosity of multitudes to see a book which had thus been interdicted, more especially as they could not but observe that its most resolute defenders were among the most godly ministers and eminent preachers of the land. The book was in this manner far more widely circulated than could possibly have been effected by any other means; the peasant in his cottage was seen studying with avidity the forbidden page,—some of the most precious truths were beheld with increased evidence and surrounded with a new glory, and that volume which had been branded by an unfaithful Assembly as containing the poison of asps, was found to drop with sweetness as the honey-comb. It seemed as if when the rulers of the church were ready to bedim and almost quench the gospel light, it had been sud-

\* Preface to the Marrow of Modern Divinity by Mr. Hog of Carnock.

† This saying is mentioned in a letter by the Rev. Gabriel Wilson of Maxton. Brown's Gospel Truth, pp. 12, 13.

denly lighted up, by invisible hands, in a thousand homes.\*

The first effect of this decision upon those members of Assembly who had distinguished themselves in the defence of the Marrow was stunning; its second was to lead to more energetic measures for the vindication of injured truth than ever. Men who, like Boston, found few to sympathize and co-operate with him in his own bounds, naturally sought correspondence with brethren of kindred sentiment and feelings at a distance, such as Ebenezer Erskine of Portmoak and Mr. Hog of Carnock. Repeated conferences were accordingly held during the year by the aggrieved brethren, for deliberation about their present duty and prayer for divine direction; and in the reminiscences of those conferences which yet remain in the letters and memoirs of some of their prominent members, nothing is more apparent than that oneness of mind which usually results from the absence of worldly policy, simple trust in God, and singleness of eye in a good cause. It was determined that a *Representation* should be presented to the next Assembly complaining of the injury that they believed to have been done to various parts of Christian truth by the act of last Assembly, specifying the principal points in reference to which they felt themselves aggrieved, expressing their apprehension of the effects of the Act in encouraging a spirit of legal preaching among the ministry, and praying for its repeal. Though this important document was drawn up in a most respectful and temperate spirit, and even expressed a readiness on the part of its authors to believe that the Act complained of was the effect of oversight rather than of deliberate intention to wound the truth, yet its presentation must be regarded as a proceeding of singular fidelity and boldness. Its

\* 'That struggle,' says Boston, 'through the mercy of God, turned to the great advantage of truth in our Church, both among the ministers and people; insomuch, it has been owned that few public differences have had such good effects. Some glorious gospel truths have been in our day set in an uncommon light.' *Memoirs*.



authors could not but foresee the troubles to which such a step would expose them, and that all their temporal interests might eventually be placed in hazard by it; many indeed who were at one in sentiment with them, kept aloof from that movement for these very reasons; and all the greater honour is due to those men, who were prepared to stand forth and brave the opposition of the Assembly, and brook all injurious consequences for the sake of truth. The following are the names of those twelve witnesses, henceforth known in ecclesiastical history by the title of the Marrowmen:—Rev. James Hog, Carnock; Thomas Boston, Ettrick; John Bonar, Torphichen; John Williamson, Inveresk; James Kid, Queensferry; Gabriel Wilson, Maxton; Ebenezer Erskine, Portmoak; Ralph Erskine, Dunfermline; James Wardlaw, Dunfermline; Henry Davidson, Galashiels; John Bathgate, Orwell; William Hunter, Lilliesleaf.

The Representation had already passed the Committee of bills, and would have been brought up for discussion, when the indisposition of the Earl of Rothes, the King's Commissioner, led to the abrupt dissolution of the Assembly (1721). The Representation was in consequence handed over to the Commission, with instructions to prepare the whole for the meeting of Assembly in the following year. Is it presumptuous to trace divine arrangement in the slight incident which thus prolonged the cause? The storms of controversy continued to waft the seeds of truth into many a quarter, whither they would never have been carried in a calm. The banner thus continuing to float aloft amid the protracted conflict, gave men time to read and interpret the precious truths inscribed on it, even though these were sometimes written in apothegm and paradox.

But our limits do not allow us to indulge in a minute narrative of the last year of the Marrow Controversy in Scotland, though it presents one of the most interesting chapters in its ecclesiastical history. The records and memoirs of the period describe the Representation as taken up on the following day by the Commission, and assailed in elaborately

prepared speeches by Principal Hadow and his followers. Transferred on the following day to a Committee, the Marrowmen return the assault, when Williamson of Inveresk 'in a point of debate, fairly lays Mr. Allan Logan, minister of Culross, and Boston is encouraged by the success of an encounter with Principal Haddow.' This Committee reports to the Commission, which appoints another Committee to prepare a vindication of the Act of Assembly against which the Representers complain. The vindication is laid upon the table of the Commission, and, after long debate, is adopted as an overture to be transmitted to the next Assembly; and, meanwhile, the Representers are summoned to appear before the Commission at its meeting in November. They come, unwitting of what is next to be done, and are surprised to find that instead of their complaint being considered, they themselves are treated as suspected of error, and twelve ensnaring queries, as if for the purpose of obtaining matter of accusation against them, put into their hands. 'Thus unexpectedly,' says Boston, 'did they turn the cannon against ourselves.'

Such unconstitutional and insidious procedure might very fairly have been resisted by the Representers, but they now began to anticipate being cast out by their brethren, and they saw that in the event of their being thus driven forth, the cause of truth would be more effectually promoted, and their own reputation placed in a clearer light, by their waving their right and condescending to reply. Ebenezer Erskine accordingly prepared a draft of answers; these were revised by Gabriel Wilson of Maxton, 'whose great compass of learning peculiarly fitted him for the task,' and the result was a document, which for luminous distinctness, argumentative power, accurate learning, and felicitous illustration, must ever be regarded as a masterpiece in theological controversy. It seemed as if the minds of the Marrowmen had become whetted and invigorated by the previous warfare; and when we consider that it was in this same year that the 'Fourfold State' of Boston, which combines in itself the quaint genius and point of

Henry with the evangelical sweetness of Flavel, which has left its indelible impress upon the religious phraseology of Scotland, and still sheds holy fragrance in the cottages of its peasantry, was given to the world,—we must be struck with the way in which God was providing an antidote in the hearts of the people, to the errors and unfaithfulness of their ecclesiastical rulers.

The Commission continued to ‘ripen the affair’ for the coming Assembly,—a work by no means rendered more easy by the replies of the twelve brethren, or less delicate by the deep and unequivocal interest which many of the people were showing in their favour. At length the month of May came with its annual Assembly (1722), and the overture of the Commission respecting the Representatives, after undergoing many corrections and changes, was laid upon its table. The disposal of their case had become the anxious and absorbing thought of all. Personal friendship, regard for the cause which the twelve brethren maintained, as well as dread on the part of many of the consequences of a severe sentence, induced some to plead for a great modification of the Act of 1720, and others even to insist on its entire repeal. The new Act did contain some considerable modifications of that of 1720, while professing to explain and confirm it; but, even in its modified form, it was found to assert and vindicate such objectionable tenets as the following:—1. That in the gospel, properly so called, there are new precepts, as particularly faith and repentance, that were never commanded or required in the moral law, either directly, or by necessary consequence. 2. That the law which believers are under, requires good works, as a federal or conditional mean of, and as having a causality in order to the obtaining of glory, and yet gives no federal right to it. 3. That the law, as to the believer, is really neither divested of its promise of life, nor of its threatening of death. 4. That the believer ought to be moved to obedience by the hopes of enjoying heaven, or any good temporal or eternal, by his obedience as a federal mean or cause thereof. The Assembly, more-

over, 'strictly prohibit and discharge all the ministers of this church, to use by writing, printing, preaching, catechising, or otherwise teaching, either publicly or privately, the positions condemned, or what may be equivalent to them or of like tendency, under pain of the censures of the church, conformed to the merit of their offence; and do ordain the several presbyteries, synods, and commissions of the General Assemblies of this church, to take particular care that the premises be punctually observed by all ministers and members of this church; and, more especially, the presbyteries and synods within whose bounds any of the brethren reside who signed the Representation. And because of the injurious reflections contained in their Representation, the Assembly do appoint their Moderator, in their name, to rebuke and admonish them; and though their offence deserves a much higher censure, yet the Assembly forbears it, in hopes that the great lenity used towards them, shall engage them to a more dutiful behaviour in time coming.'

The rebuke was meekly received by the brethren as a part of the shame which they were called to bear for the name of Christ, but they could not obey an inhibition which would seal their lips against proclaiming truths which they had declared to be above all price. Mr. Kid of Queensferry, a man of singular boldness, was chosen to lay a protest upon the table, which closed with these resolute sentences. 'We do protest that we look upon the said fifth Act of Assembly, 1720, as contrary to the Word of God, and to the foresaid standards of doctrine and covenants, and of what we have complained of in the foresaid eighth Act, as of dangerous consequence thereto; and that therefore we dare not in any manner of way, no not by silence, consent unto or approve of them, nor the Acts of Assembly relative thereunto; and that it shall be lawful to us, agreeable to the Word of God and the standards of doctrine aforesaid in this church, to profess, preach, and still bear testimony unto the truths condemned or otherwise injured by the said Acts of Assembly, notwithstanding of the said

Acts, and whatsoever shall follow thereupon; upon all which we take instruments and crave extracts.'

Many expected that this protest, containing as it did so unequivocal a refusal of the Assembly's authority, would have led to more severe and summary measures. But a hint in the royal letter, representing the unfitness of divisions for the 'present feared confusions,' induced the dominant party in the Assembly to wink at a contempt of their authority, which in other circumstances they would doubtless have visited with their highest censures. In this case the brethren would have walked forth with Ebenezer Erskine and Boston of Ettrick at their head, and the Secession, which at length took place, have been antedated by several years. It was well that it was prevented, and that the Secession, when it did at length occur, should have been grounded on a yet wider basis, and carried along with it, yet more decidedly, the convictions and sympathies of the people.

It would of course be to form much too unfavourable an estimate of the state of matters in the Church of Scotland at this time, to suppose that these honoured men, whose faithful and heroic contendings in behalf of injured truth we have been endeavouring to trace, were the only ministers in the church that held fast by a free and unrestricted gospel. Undoubtedly there were many others who, though they did not join with the Marrowmen in the judicial steps which they felt themselves called upon to take, yet sympathised with them in their views, and sought to ward off the censures that fell upon them. And even among those who took an active part against the Marrowmen, it is undeniable that there were to be found several men of intellectual gifts and sincere piety, whose opposition to the Marrow and its defenders is to be accounted for rather on the supposition that they held inadequate and confused views of the gospel, than that they did not hold it at all. They were in much the same state of mind in which Boston acknowledges himself to have been before

the Marrow fell into his hands, during his early pastorate,—living men in fetters,—like Lazarus, still having clinging to them the cerements of the grave, and needing that the divine voice, which had commanded them to come forth, should speak a second time and say, ‘Loose him and let him go.’ There is reason for thinking that Principal Hadow himself belonged to this party. And doubtless there were others who were tempted to assume a hostile attitude towards the Marrow by a too fastidious recoil from some of its strong and paradoxical expressions; and others still from a temporizing spirit, or a dread of consequences. But even when these concessions have been made, there cannot be a doubt that those who went to swell the majority against the twelve brethren, were men of a different class,—men who approached more or less nearly to Professor Simson in their doctrinal tendencies, whose legal sentiments were in direct antagonism to the gospel, whose ‘drowsy tinklings lulled the flock to sleep,’ who, excluding from their teaching those grand peculiarities which are at once the glory and the power of Christianity, held up to their people the mere dead image of a cold morality in its room. The condemnation of the Marrow, therefore, was justly regarded as another token of the continued defection of the church; and strong suspicions began to be extensively awakened in the public mind, of a design in the dominant party in the Assembly to corrupt and betray the truth. Nor had they long to wait, ere circumstances arose to strengthen their suspicions, and to encourage the most gloomy forebodings. The course of the church was not only downwards, but, as in the law of mechanics, it was every step with accelerated progress.

We do not now refer solely to the opposition and injury which the friends of the Marrow, and those who were suspected of being tinctured by its spirit, were often called to encounter in the provincial judicatories, though the testimonies on this subject are painfully abundant.



Processes were raised against several of the Marrow-men on frivolous and factious grounds;\* their translation from obscure stations in the church to places of more prominence and usefulness, was discouraged and opposed, and on this account Boston affirms that he was 'staked down to Ettrick' at a period when both health and mental peace called for change; teasing and ensnaring questions were addressed to students and licentiates, to stop their way either of being entered upon trials, or ordained into churches; while those that were of the most loose and corrupt principles were most favoured by them. 'These things,' says one who loved the Scottish Church with all the affection of a son to a mother, 'are too notour to be denied; and these were some of the sad and lasting effects of the foresaid Acts of Assembly, and the sad occasion of planting many churches with men that were little acquainted with the gospel, yea, enemies to the doctrine of grace.'† Other events soon occurred, which showed that there were men in the bosom of the church, and even in its highest places of influence and trust, that were ready to shake the very pillars of revealed truth.

The unfaithful lenity shown to Professor Simson, in the process formerly raised against him for Arminian and Pelagian errors, had operated in the manner that might have been anticipated. In a second process raised against him in the Assembly of 1726, it was proved that he had not only continued to teach all his former errors, but that, emboldened by the gentle and apologetic strain of the Assembly's former sentence, he had taught his students 'That the Son of God is not necessarily existent; that the three

\* It was during a debate that arose in the Synod of Fife, in connexion with one of these processes, that on some members denying the Father's gift of Christ to sinners of mankind, Ebenezer Erskine rose and spoke in the following terms:—'Moderator, our Lord Jesus says of himself, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." This he uttered to a promiscuous multitude; *and let me see the man who dare say he said wrong.*' This short speech, spoken with characteristic majesty and energy, is said to have made a profound impression on the members of Synod, and on all present.

† Ralph Erskine's Faith no Fancy.

persons of the Godhead are not the same in substance; and that necessary existence, supreme Deity, and being the only true God, may be taken in a sense importing the personal property of the Father, and so not belonging to the Son.' Here was an unblushing attempt to sow Arianism in the church, and to induce its future teachers to put dishonour on Him 'whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God.' His attempts to find support for his opinions in the standards of the church proved him to be dishonest as well as heretical, while his tardy recantation, when he at length saw that this course was likely to fail, was without value, because without the least evidence of sincerity. The friends of truth ardently desired that the divinity of the Saviour might be vindicated in the highest censure upon its blasphemous assailant, in reference to whom an apostle would have commanded, 'Let him be Anathema Maranatha.' They were doomed to be disappointed;—when the zeal of the Assembly burned, it was against another class of men. Professor Simson was merely suspended, in the meantime, from his ecclesiastical functions, while the case was remitted to the inferior judicatories, to obtain their opinion in time for the next Assembly. The majority of presbyteries gave it as their opinion that he should be deposed from the office of the ministry, as indispensable to the vindication of insulted truth. But the advice was disregarded, his suspension was merely continued, while he was left to enjoy all the privileges of church communion and the emoluments of office. This was all the censure that the Assembly saw it necessary to inflict on one who had disobeyed their former injunctions, and now 'denied the Lord that bought him.'\* It was on occasion of pronouncing this sentence, so inadequate to the offence, that the venerable Boston rose in the midst of the Assembly, and, in the most solemn and impressive manner, uttered the following dissent:—'I cannot help thinking,' said he, addressing the Moderator, 'that the cause of Jesus Christ,

\* This second process terminated in 1729.



as to the great and essential point of his supreme Deity, has been at the bar of this Assembly requiring justice; and as I am shortly to answer at His bar for all I do or say, I dare not give my assent to the decision of this Act. On the contrary, I find myself obliged to offer a protest against it; and, therefore, in my own name, and in the name of all that shall adhere to me, and if none here will (looking round the house with an air of majesty, he added) —for myself alone I crave leave to enter my protest against the decision of this act.’

There was a consistency in the Acts of successive Assemblies at this period, which proved how strongly the tide of defection had begun to flow. Mr. Campbell, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in St. Andrews, had published several tracts and treatises, in which some of the most erroneous tenets of Professor Simson were revived, and other sentiments avowed which evidently belonged to the same family of errors. In particular, he affirmed, ‘That the existence of God and the immortality of the soul cannot be discovered by the light of nature, and yet that the laws of nature are a certain and sufficient rule to guide men to happiness, and that our observation of these is the great means of our real and lasting happiness. He maintained that self-love is the chief motive and standard of all actions, religious and virtuous; and that, seeing God himself acts for his self-interest, we cannot act from any higher principle than our self-interest. He cast ridicule upon close walking with God and consulting him in all our ways, as *enthusiasm*.’ The theology of such sentiments evidently verged on the lowest rationalism; the ethical principles bore a closer analogy to those of Seneca and Epictetus than of Scripture. They were repeatedly refuted and exposed in the writings of the day, and yet no whisper of dissatisfaction was heard in the Assembly, but their author continued to be employed in business of highest trust and importance;\* and when at length† the complaints

\* Index to Unprinted Acts of Assembly for 1734.

† Assembly 1736.

from without, constrained the Assembly to a reluctant scrutiny, he was allowed to varnish over his errors with vague and unsatisfactory explanations, and dismissed from the bar of the Assembly uncensured and uncondemned. Such criminal lenity of judgment placed beyond doubt the tendencies and prevalent sentiments of the judges themselves. How had the temple of God become polluted!

While the doctrine of the church was thus allowed by her rulers to be corrupted and betrayed, the same men were proving themselves the most willing instruments in invading the rights and liberties of her people. We have already noticed the indignant resistance with which the Act imposing patronage was first received by the Assembly, and the cautious policy with which its obnoxious powers were allowed to remain dormant for a series of years. And had the Assembly retained this becoming temper, the enactment would have remained comparatively innocuous, for unless the candidate accepted the presentation, it was declared by the Act itself to be 'null and void,' and the Assembly had it in its power to prevent the candidate from accepting, unless he had the call and consent of the people. But the spirit of the Assembly was gradually tamed and deteriorated; and, many years before the period of which we now write, had undergone, in reference to patronage, all those changes described by the poet in reference to vice:

'For seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.'

In the face of reclaiming congregations and remonstrating presbyteries, the Assembly lent itself as the willing tool of patrons and of the state in the effecting of violent settlements;—now commanding presbyteries, in the majority of whose members there still lingered the spirit of a better time, to ordain the presentee, on pain of the severest ecclesiastical censures in case of refusal; and in other circumstances, doing violence to the constitution of the church, and to the rights of presbyteries, as well as of the people, by sending 'riding Committees' of their number to do the

work of tyranny, when it was thought inconvenient or impossible to constrain the obedience of the presbytery of the bounds. In cases where the indignation of the oppressed and insulted people had risen to an alarming pitch, or where it was thought possible to awe them into acquiescence, the presence of the military was procured, and the hireling pastor conducted to the scene of his future ministry between files of soldiery, and amid the beating of drums and the brandishing of swords. Strange road to the affections of a people! One scene of this kind described by an eye-witness will give a more vivid idea of the state of matters at this period, than the most lengthened general details. 'These and such like things were done to terrify the people; and yet for all that, these gentlemen and the two ministers that were to serve the edict, being conscious to themselves of the badness of their cause, and what an evil part they were acting, thought not fit to do it until they got a troop of dragoons to be a guard to them; and accordingly, November 17, 1717, being the Sabbath day, they came to Bathgate, and when approaching the town, they caused beat their drum and draw their swords, and in this posture came through the town, guarding the ministers into the church, riding and striking with their naked swords at the women and others standing gazing upon the wayside, which was a melancholy Sabbath in Bathgate, the Sabbath day being much profaned, not only by the people of the place, but by many coming from other parishes, to see a new way of propagating the gospel by red-coat booted apostles, officiating as elders.'\*

We have already stated that it was the same men whom we have already beheld inflicting wounds upon the truth, and swelling the ranks of doctrinal defection, that showed themselves the most willing agents in trampling on the liberties of the Christian people; and the explanation of this identity should not pass unnoticed. Had the people been left

\* Letter to a minister of the gospel concerning the parish of Bathgate, p. 18. M'Kerrow's History of the Secession, p. 44.

to their free choice, they would uniformly have chosen men of evangelical sentiment and spirit. Indeed there is a response in the consciences of men to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, even when these are rebelled against by their passions, and testimonies to their divinity may thus be traced in the deepest recesses of our moral nature. The consequence has often been, that men who had never been the subjects of spiritual renovation, have yet felt in an evangelical ministry an adaptation to their case, and have preferred it to all others. An unfettered people would therefore have proved one of the most efficient barriers against doctrinal unfaithfulness, while patronage, on the other hand, was the readiest means of introducing a secular clergy and extending a corrupt faith. That patronage had already wrought out these sad results to an alarming extent might be proved from the testimonies of many who were weeping in secret over the desolations of Zion. Let one witness be heard, the truth of whose sombre picture has never been set aside. ‘Matters look with a very dismal and threatening aspect. Ministers are thrust in upon vacant parishes, contrary to the wishes of elders and people, in all corners of the land. Disaffected heritors interest themselves everywhere in the settlement of parishes, and they introduce such ministers as elders and people are averse to. Our congregations are thus planted with a set of corrupt ministers who are strangers to the power of godliness; and therefore, neither in their doctrine nor in their walk is there any savour of Christ among them. Yea, such are becoming the prevailing party in the ministry, and too many of these are mockers at the exercises and real experiences of the godly. At the opening of our Synodical meeting at Perth, Mr. Thomas F——, minister at Dumbarnie, preached a very loose general sermon, with a sneer and some bitter invectives against serious ministers. Some, said he, loved a popular cant, and affected to make grimaces in preaching. This same man, some short time after, when Mr. Moncrieff of Abernethy remarked on a young man’s discourse before the Presbytery of Perth, that

there was nothing of Christ in it, had the assurance to reply, "and must Christ still be the burden of the song?" Yet the Presbytery took no notice of the scandalous expression—a sad swatch of the spirit that prevails among us.\* It may serve to give some idea of the extent to which the system we have been describing had now reached, to mention that in one Assembly there were no fewer than twelve petitions and appeals from reclaiming congregations against violent settlements.

These petitions and appeals, though they seldom or never succeeded in their main object, yet served the important purpose of affording to faithful ministers in the Assembly, an opportunity of exposing and denouncing the corrupt and tyrannical measures of the dominant party,—an opportunity which they were not slow to embrace. It is worthy of notice, that the same men whom we have seen the most forward to stem the tide of doctrinal error,—raising their warning voice against the Arian and Pelagian errors, and standing in defence of the 'Marrow' as over the body of a wounded friend, were now the foremost in asserting the people's trampled rights, and exposing the acts of the abettors of patronage in all their naked deformity and treachery. These merciless exposures helped to keep alive the spirit of liberty among the people; and the rulers, provoked by the scorching sarcasm which indignant truth was constantly flinging into the midst of them, determined to buttress their first act of tyranny, by another. The Assembly of 1730 enacted that in future no reasons of Dissent against 'the determinations of church judicatures,' should be entered on record. This enactment took place on occasion of a sentence of Assembly enjoining the Presbytery of Chirnside to proceed with a violent settlement in the parish of Hutton; against which several members craved that their dissent might be recorded. The demand was refused, and the refusal passed into a general law. Perhaps the arbitrary and tyrannical nature of this deci-

\* Diary of Rev. W. Wilson of Perth, Nov. 10, 1731. Ferrier's Memoirs of W. Wilson, pp. 168, 169.

sion, has not generally received its due prominence of denunciation, in the ecclesiastical notices of the period. For not to speak of the right which immemorial usage had given to every member of Assembly of having his dissent from obnoxious measures put on record, it seems to grow out of the very constitution of deliberative and judicial bodies, so that the moment it is removed, freedom has departed with it. In what other way could an individual who was aggrieved by a decision exonerate his conscience, or leave permanent and tangible testimony to succeeding generations that the tide of defection had not been allowed to flow on unresisted? The removal of this right by the dominant party in the Assembly at this period, too closely resembled the conduct of those who put out the light that their evil deeds may escape detection or exposure, and was an unequivocal, however unwilling, confession on their part, of their secret consciousness of the unjust and unscriptural nature of the course they were pursuing. It was a heavy blow struck at constitutional liberty. But a heavier, a more deadly blow still, was aimed at the rights of the people in the following year.

Up to this time it had been the law of the church, that in the case of a patron not presenting to a vacant charge within six months after the vacancy occurred, the filling up of the charge should devolve upon the presbytery within whose bounds the vacant parish lay. The instances were by no means rare in which the patron declined to exercise his right within the prescribed period; and in such cases the presbytery, bound by no particular regulations, might yield up the choice into the hands of the people. Even this fragment of liberty was grudged to the people, and it was considered expedient to withdraw it. Tyranny never sleeps soundly or sits at ease, and the men who now guided the counsels of the Assembly, felt that while this remained, it would cherish the remembrance of former liberties, and thus keep alive the desire to regain them. An overture was accordingly introduced into the Assembly (1731) to the following effect, that '*where patrons might*



*neglect or decline to exercise their right of presentation. the minister should be chosen by a majority of the heritors and elders, if Protestant.*' The ostensible reason of this overture, was the promotion of uniformity and peace. Miserable and hollow peace that was to be purchased by bribes and secured by bondage! 'What difference,' exclaimed Ebenezer Erskine, glowing with a righteous and indignant zeal, 'does a piece of land make between man and man, in the affairs of Christ's kingdom which is not of this world? Are we not commanded in the word to do nothing by partiality? whereas here is the most manifest partiality in the world. We must have "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," or the privileges of his church, "without respect of persons;" whereas by this act we shew respect to the man with the gold ring and the gay clothing, beyond the man with the vile raiment and poor attire. I conceive, Moderator, that our public managements and acts should run in the same channel with God's way, not diverging. We are told that "God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith." It is not said he hath chosen the heritors of this world, as we have done; but he hath "chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." And if they be "heirs of the kingdom," I wish to know by what warrant they are stript of the privileges of the kingdom.'\*

There was a well known regulation of the church, however, to the effect that no overture could become a law until it had been sent down to presbyteries, and the majority of them had given it their sanction; and in compliance with this it was sent down to presbyteries, that they might consider it and report to the next Assembly.

Alarm spread throughout the churches, and this alarm was increased, when the details of the overture were more closely examined and considered. It was found that the heritors were not required even to be resident in the parish;

\* Speech when the Overture anent the planting of churches was passed into an Act by the Assembly, May 16, 1732. Frazer's Life, pp. 359, 360.



and while they must not be papists, it was not necessary that they should be members of the church; they might be Jacobites and therefore sworn enemies to its constitution, they might be infidels and therefore sworn enemies to its faith; and as the heritors would often outnumber the elders, the spectacle might soon be anticipated of a band of these men forcing a presentee upon a parish, in the face at once of a remonstrating eldership and a reclaiming people. And this overture was the suggestion and production of the church's own rulers! Could it be doubted that their intention was to break up all connection between the people and their ministers, and to lay the church bound and bleeding at the feet of the secular power?

Meetings were held of pious ministers for prayer and deliberation, in this hour of the church's decaying liberties. A representation of grievances and a petition for redress were prepared, in which many of the errors and defections we have described were complained against, and the Assembly entreated to dismiss and condemn the above-mentioned overture. A similar representation and petition was prepared and transmitted for presentation by 1,700 members of the church. Even in the presbyteries, the spirit of tame acquiescence was roused into remonstrance, and an attempt made to prevent the last shred of the people's rights, from being torn away by the ruthless and unnatural hand of their ecclesiastical rulers.

The Assembly (1732) came, and the reports of presbyteries regarding the overture were examined. It appeared that only six recommended the adoption of the overture; that twelve could only approve of it, on its being subjected to material alterations; and that thirty-one expressed their entire and unqualified disapprobation. The majority of presbyteries had thus unequivocally declared against the overture. But the ruling party in the Assembly were not to be outdone. In the face of a standing law of the church, they contended that the reports of inferior courts, were only to be regarded as opinions which the Assembly might either receive or reject; and by a mode of ingenious calcula-

tion, which even honourable men of the world would have spurned, it was insisted that even supposing the reports of presbyteries were allowed to decide the case, the majority were in their favour, since eighteen who had not reported might fairly be reckoned as approving, and this gave them the numerical preponderance. As for the representations and petitions of the ministers and private members, they were even refused to be transmitted by the Committee of Bills; and on the ministers presenting themselves at the bar of the Assembly to protest against this denial of their just rights, their protest was superciliously refused to be either received or recorded.

How had the gold become dim! How different was the Church of Scotland now, compared with the time when she was beheld emerging from the flames of persecution, not with corrupting bribes in her hands, but with liberties that had been bought with blood. Truth had been wounded, her pulpits were filled by a hireling clergy, 'whose voice the sheep did not know,' the privileges of the people had been tamely yielded up, and the last blow given to them by the hands of her own rulers, the constitutional rights of her presbyteries had been invaded, and the right of protesting and petitioning, by which wounded consciences may be relieved, and faithful men seek the removal of prevailing evils, had been wrested from them, and all this by a tyrannical Assembly, itself the slave of the secular power. A crisis had come in her history, in which if there were not men resolved to be faithful at all hazards, the fate of truth and liberty might be sealed for centuries. Was there no one ready to burst her bonds, and, passing from her pale, to provide an asylum for truth and freedom for her people? There was. God had long been preparing him for the work to which he was now called. We have seen him already, and he will come more fully before us in our next chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

### ORIGIN OF THE SECESSION.

Portmoak—Ebenezer Erskine—A Portmoak sacrament—The past—Secret resolutions—The Synod—sermon—Extracts—Remarks—The Synod in a storm—Proposal to censure—Mr. Erskine's appeal—The Synod at Stirling—General Assembly—Kingaldrum—Kinross—The Four Brethren—Rebuke and Protest—Curious incident—The Four Brethren recalled—Insulting treatment—'Persecuted, but not forsaken'—The Commission—An eye-witness—The Four Brethren suspended—Protest—Sacrament at Queensferry—Growing popular interest—A net—Escape from the net—Expulsion from the Church—THE SECESSION—The Basis—Mistakes corrected—Moral heroism—A historic church.

BENEATH the shadow of the lofty Lomond hills, and stretching down to the margin of the beautiful Lochleven, lies the rural parish of Portmoak, in Kinross-shire. Four little villages, Portmoak, Kinnesswood, Scotland-well, and Easter Balgedie, supply the principal population of the parish, and look down from their romantic position towards those islands, one of which is surrounded with peculiar interest by having been the scene for nearly eleven months of the captivity of Mary Queen of Scots.

In this parish, Ebenezer Erskine had discharged the duties of the pastoral office, from the year 1703, nearly up to the time of which we now write.\* His descent may be traced to some of the noblest families of the land; but the greater number of our readers, it is presumed, will be yet better pleased to learn, that he was the son of a venerable Nonconformist minister, who was ejected from his

\* He was born June 22, 1680.

charge, and very narrowly escaped confinement in the Bass prison, and even exile, for conscience-sake,—Henry Erskine of Cornhill.\* The Father of the Secession was the son of a Nonconformist;—the spirit of the Secession and of Puritanism were at least as near of kin.

From the time of his entrance on the ministry, Mr. Erskine appears to have given the most exemplary attention to all the external duties of his sacred office; but it was not till after some few years that he obtained distinct and impressive views of evangelical truth, and became the subject of that divine internal change by which we ‘enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ The circumstance which proved the occasion of this change, is interesting. Sitting in his study one day, he chanced to overhear a conversation, on their religious experience, between his wife, Alison Turpie, and his brother Ralph. The two Christian friends were seated in a bower beneath the window of the study, which happened to be open at the time, and were freely unbosoming themselves to each other on the matters of the soul. Ebenezer Erskine was riveted by the conversation, and could not withdraw himself from listening. He immediately thought with himself—‘they have ideas and feelings to which I am yet a stranger,—they possess a valuable *something* which I have not.’ This thought formed the first seed of a new life. Conversations soon followed between himself and his wife, such as those which we may imagine to have taken place between Apollos and Priscilla; the trammels of legal bondage fell from his soul; and the glorious liberty and constraining love of a child of God, of which from that hour he became the happy subject, may be traced in the pages of a diary, which nearly half a century afterwards was brought to light, and in a ministry of almost unequalled power and success, whose blessed influence, descending from sire to son, is said to have not even

\* Brief Memoir of Rev. H. Erskine, prefixed to Frazer’s Life of E. Erskine.

yet wholly passed away from the region that was favoured with it.\*

Contemporary writers describe him as a man who combined in singular union great suavity of manner with intrepidity of action, simplicity of aim with that profound knowledge of man which lies at the root of practical wisdom;—his bitterest enemies have never been able to establish a charge against his sincerity or scrupulous conscientiousness. Possessed of great natural eloquence, this had all the advantage of a voice of great music and compass, of a grave and simple delivery, such as most befits an ambassador of God, and of an outward appearance of such unusual nobility and majesty as was the theme of general remark, and commanded among his hearers universal awe. ‘I never saw so much of the majesty of God,’ said Mr. Hutton of Dalkeith, ‘in any mortal man, as in Ebenezer Erskine.’ Mr. Adam Gib of Edinburgh having asked a friend if he had ever heard Mr. Erskine preach, was answered in the negative. ‘Well, then, Sir,’ rejoined Mr. Gib with emotion, ‘you never heard the gospel in its majesty.’ A more striking testimony still, perhaps, was given in the reproof which one hearer, who had travelled more than twenty miles to hear Mr. Erskine preach, gave to another who complained of drowsiness,—‘O man! there is a savour coming out of that pulpit, which I think might keep any person awake.’†

Long before the period of which we now write, the friends of the gospel among the ministers of the Church of Scotland, had been led to cultivate an almost exclusive intercourse with one another. This arose at once out of common views, common feelings, and common dangers. They were standing together against a common current, that was swelling and deepening every hour; what more natural in such circumstances than that they should draw

\* Brown’s Gospel Truth. Sketch of Life of E. Erskine, p. 95.

† Frazer’s Life of E. Erskine, pp. 482, 483.

the more closely into one? One of the most delightful occasions of these hallowed re-unions was the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the parish of one of the evangelical ministers. At these times, anticipated for weeks and even months before, a goodly band of gifted ministers would come together to aid in conducting the hallowed solemnities, and thousands of eager and expecting listeners might be seen following in their train. The importance of such meetings, is perhaps not always seen by a modern reader. It is forgotten that in many of the parishes of Scotland the gospel was by this time no longer preached, and that these sacred festivals, often occurring in the months of summer, afforded the only opportunity to multitudes, of listening in peace to 'the silver-trumpet's heavenly call.' At one after another of these communions, a young man, who had risen before the morning sun, and travelled often a distance of more than fifteen miles over the intervening mountains, might be seen wrapped in a shepherd's plaid, and listening with intellectual countenance and delighted heart to the gracious words which fell from the speaker's lips. He was then an obscure teacher in a rustic day-school. Thirty years afterwards he was known throughout the land, as the author of the Bible Dictionary and the Self-Interpreting Bible.\*

To no sacrament did the people flock in greater multitudes than to that of Portmoak. Persons have been known to travel to it, even from the distance of sixty or seventy miles; and there are records still extant, which describe the elders of the parish as commissioning wine for more than two thousand communicants. In addition to the worshippers that congregated in the church, two large assemblies met in the open air on the sides of the neighbouring hill, and sat unwearied, listening to successive preachers. They were occasions of high religious festival. The heavenly dews, which had been withdrawn from so many of the parishes of Scotland, because the heavenly seed

\* Brown's Gospel Truth, p. 133.



was no longer sown in them, seemed to descend here with pentecostal abundance. Multitudes on their death-bed, long afterwards looked back with grateful remembrance to the hills of Portmoak, as Bethels where the God of Jacob had met with them and blessed them. Doubtless when 'He numbers up the people, he will count that this man and that man were born there.' 'They say,' writes Mr. Erskine's sister, speaking of one of these Portmoak communions, 'that to the comfortable felt experience of many, it was as great a day of the gospel as ever they witnessed.'\*

Such was the man whom the providence of God had long been preparing for the great work of founding a new and independent ecclesiastical body, in which the honour of Christian truth and the rights of the Christian people should be successfully vindicated, when the Scottish Church had wounded the one and betrayed the other. Ebenezer Erskine was no new and sudden friend of evangelic doctrine and Christian liberty. We have already seen him through a space of more than twenty years, standing forth the consistent and intrepid friend of both. In 1712, we found him resisting the imposition of the Abjuration-Oath, and maintaining a good conscience by standing to the last among the ranks of the Non-Jurants. In 1717, we saw his name enrolled among those of the twelve Marrowmen; and through the successive years of the process regarding the Marrow, we behold him, along with the venerable Boston, ever foremost amid the obloquy and frown of Commissions and Assemblies, to raise up the fallen standard of truth. And at each following stage of oppression, in which the Assembly seeks to wreathe the yoke of patronage around the neck of the people, and to tear from their grasp the last remnant of privilege, he is present with every form of bold remonstrance and constitutional resistance.

This had been the character of his past public career;

\* Frazer's *Life of E. Erskine*, pp. 202, 203.



and when we follow him into his closet, and trace the workings of his heart there, as these are disclosed in his diary and correspondence, we discover that these public acts were the expression of resolutions formed on his knees, in which he had determined to suffer anything and to lose anything,—everything, rather than turn from the path which God and conscience dictated. So early as 1714 we find him, after a sacrament at Orwell, entering in his diary the following record:—‘I recognised in secret the solemn dedication I had made of myself in public, and avowed the Lord to be my God. I was made to say that through his grace I would die for him; and would die at a gibbet for him, if he would be with me to carry me through. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God.’\*

And in a letter to a pious sister of yet earlier date, he unbosoms himself thus, ‘All the power and policy of hell, is set to work for the ruin and overthrow of the Church of Scotland. The prospect of the sifting storm, that seems to be at hand, is like sometimes to stagger and shake me, and makes my spirit to shrink within me. I know not how I shall be able to stand the storm itself, or how I shall do in the swellings of Jordan. Being as yet entirely unacquainted, as to my own experience, with sufferings for the truth and cause of Christ, I am afraid to say with Peter, “Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I.” But this I may say, if he needs my property, my family, my very heart’s blood, to bear witness to his cause and work, I am obliged, though they were ten thousand times more valuable than they are, to lay them all down at his feet, and to follow him to a Golgotha or a Calvary.’†

In this way, Mr. Erskine had long been unconsciously putting on his spiritual armour for a great work. We have already seen him tried in many a well-contested struggle, but he is now to pass through a more severe and difficult ordeal than ever; and in the hand of God to accomplish by separation, what he had long hoped to see

\* Frazer’s *Life of E. Erskine*, p. 116.

† *Ibid.* p. 163.

effected by internal reform. Let us now rapidly trace the steps that led to this result.

In the previous year,—September 6, 1731,—he had been transferred from Portmoak to Stirling, and this had, soon after, been followed by his being placed in the chair as Moderator of the Synod of Stirling and Perth. In this way, it fell to the lot of Mr. Erskine, before retiring from the moderatorship, to preach at the opening of the Synod at Perth, on the 18th day of October, 1732. What was it natural for a faithful minister to do, in the circumstances in which he now found himself placed? Looking around him, he beheld error in doctrine tolerated and even sanctioned by the Assembly, and widely disseminated by many of its ministers, the rights of the Christian people wantonly violated, the honour of the Church laid in the dust, especially by that latest Act which he had seen the Assembly pass but a few months before, in which the patronage was lodged in the hands of heritors and elders where the patron himself declined or delayed to present. He found himself too shut out, by recent arbitrary acts, from testifying against public evils, by the presenting of petitions or the recording of dissents. One sphere alone yet remained open for faithful and intrepid witness-bearing, and this was the pulpit. And was not the distinct and authoritative voice of God to his servant in these circumstances, ‘Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins?’ Ebenezer Erskine heard this solemn voice, and obeyed.

The venerable preacher read as his text on this momentous occasion, the words in Psalm cxviii. 22, ‘The stone which the builders refused, is become the head stone of the corner.’ He proceeded to speak of the Church under the similitude of a building,—of the character in which Christ stands to this building as its approved, tried, living foundation-stone,—of the character of the workmen that are employed in rearing this spiritual structure,—of the error those workmen are charged with, in refusing the stone of God’s choosing, and of the glory to which Christ

shall be exalted, in spite of all the attempts of false builders to keep him out of his place, 'He is made the Head Stone of the corner.' His illustrations of these various points abounded with those sublime and consoling statements of divine truth, which displayed a mind bathed in the very spirit and rich in the very phraseology of scripture, and which, when given forth with the grave majesty and sweet intonations of Ebenezer Erskine, gave to his ministry, in the presence of unprejudiced hearers, so commanding a power, and threw around it so indescribable a charm. It was not until he was far advanced in his discourse that he began to allude to the evils and defections of the times; and those allusions, when they came, seemed to grow so naturally and spontaneously out of his theme and his position, that not to have uttered them would have been like the unfaithful and timid withholding of most seasonable though unwelcome truth. Let us listen to a few of those references, and judge whether they most resemble the fierce invectives of an exasperated partisan, or the faithful and intrepid testimony of one who feels himself commissioned to proclaim 'the burden of the Lord.'

Under his third head, when speaking of the builders employed to rear the spiritual fabric of the church, he utters this faithful testimony,—

'There is a twofold call necessary for a man's meddling as a builder in the Church of God; there is the call of God, and of his Church. God's call consists in his qualifying a man for the work; and inspiring him with a holy zeal and desire to employ these qualifications for the glory of God and the good of his Church. The call of the Church, lies in the free choice and election of the Christian people. The promise of conduct and counsel, in the choice of men that are to build, is not made to patrons, heritors, or any other set of men, but to the Church, the body of Christ, to whom apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are given. As it is the natural privilege of every house or society of men to have the choice of their own servants or officers, so it is the privilege of the House of God in a

particular manner. What a miserable bondage would it be reckoned for any family to have stewards or servants imposed on them by strangers; who might give the children a stone for bread, or a scorpion instead of a fish, poison instead of medicine? And shall we suppose that ever God granted a power to any set of men, patrons, heritors, or whatever they be—a power to impose servants on his family without their consent? they being the freest society in the world.’

Those are noble sentences asserting the inalienable rights of the Christian people, and that is one of those ‘winged words,’ whose intense truth and pointed brevity make them immortal, ‘THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS THE FREEST SOCIETY IN THE WORLD.’ Again, speaking of the error of the builders in rejecting the stone of God’s choosing, he says,—

‘The Jewish builders valued themselves exceedingly upon their connexion with the rulers and great folk in that day; and, having joined interest with them, treated the common people, especially those who owned Christ and attended his ministry and that of his apostles, as an unhalloed mob, as is clear from John vii. 45, where they having sent some of their officers to apprehend Christ, the officers return, declaring that “never man spake like this man.” To which the Pharisees reply, “Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who know not the law are accursed.” As if the common people had been obliged to follow them and the rulers with whom they connected themselves, by an implicit faith and obedience, without ever bringing their doctrines and actings to the bar of the law and testimony, to be tried there.’

Farther on, he gives utterance to the following weighty sentence, which, though spoken more than a century since, sounds, alas, with no antiquated meaning,—

‘I am persuaded that carnal notions of the kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, lie at the bottom of many of the evils and corruptions in the day we live in.’

And towards the close of his address, the dauntless witness-bearer lifts up this sublime and thrilling testimony for the violated and dishonoured rights of Christ's Crown,—

‘A cry is gone up to heaven against the builders by the spouse of Christ; like that, Cant. v. 7, “The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my vail from me.” A cry and complaint came in before the bar of the last Assembly, for relief and redress of these and many other grievances, both from ministers and people. But instead of a due regard had thereunto, an Act is passed confining the power of election unto heritors and elders; whereby a new wound is given to the prerogative of Christ and the privileges of his subjects. I shall say the less of this Act now, that I had opportunity to exoner myself with relation to it, before the National Assembly where it was passed. Only allow me to say, that whatever church authority may be in that Act, yet it wants the authority of the Son of God. All ecclesiastical authority under heaven is derived from him; and therefore any act that wants his authority, has no authority at all. And seeing the Reverend Synod has put me in this place, where I am in Christ's stead, I must be allowed to say of this Act, what I apprehend Christ himself would say of it, were he personally present where I am; and that is, that by this Act the corner-stone is rejected from; he is rejected in his poor members, and the rich of this world put in their room. If Christ were personally present, where I am by the Synod's appointment in his stead, he would say in reference to that Act, “Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these little ones, ye did it to me.” By this Act, Christ is rejected in his authority, because I can find no warrant from the word of God to confer the spiritual privileges of his house upon the rich beyond the poor: whereas, by this Act, the man with the gold ring and gay clothing, is preferred unto the man with the vile raiment and poor attire.’

Thus did this faithful watchman sound his trumpet aloud, in the ears of slumbering and degenerate rulers. Shall he

be blamed for an indecent and unwarrantable stretch of the privileges of his position, by denouncing so plainly, in such a presence, the errors and iniquities of the times? The charge would come strangely from a people who are accustomed to point back to those as the purest times of the church, when the preacher levelled his thunders against tyrannical and time-serving courtiers, and when a Knox, with Bible in hand, did not shrink from rebuking the follies and infidelities of royalty, and the pulpit exercised much of that public censorship on passing events, which, in our own days, has been transferred to the press. But we do not need to have recourse to such dubious precedents for the vindication of Ebenezer Erskine, or to remind our readers how the dominant party in the church at this period not unfrequently assailed the friends of the gospel from the pulpit, with epithets of sneering scorn and personal invective. His defence rests upon far surer ground. In the last Assembly, the liberties of the people had been wrested from them; this was the crowning act of a long course of defection, and he was now addressing many who had been accessaries to the treachery. Ecclesiastical tyranny had already shut up against him every other channel of constitutional remonstrance and public protest. The pulpit alone remained free; and was the liberty which the pulpit afforded of exonerating his conscience and raising his testimony in behalf of the people's rights, to be yielded up to artificial delicacies and conventional proprieties? No; this earnest reformer was thinking only how he might please God, and had he confined himself to soothing generalities at such an hour, we should then have held him incapable of defence. The words in which he closed his sermon, express the spirit in which he had spoken it: 'Whenever we discern the danger coming, either from open enemies or pretended friends, or our fellow-builders going wrong, let us give the cry, like faithful watchmen, and though they be offended, there is no help for that. It is a heavy charge that is laid by God against some as above, that they were dumb dogs that could not bark,



but preferred their own carnal ease unto the safety of the church.'

His fellow-builders *were* offended. The references of Mr. Erskine, though forming but a small proportion to the body of his discourse, though growing naturally out of his theme, and expressed wherever they occurred without any of the bitterness of personal invective, yet fell upon the majority of his hearers with all the stinging power of unwelcome truth. Each seemed to feel as if the honest remonstrance had been levelled at himself, and there are few things in the world more intolerant than an uneasy conscience. Indignant scowls were visible on many a countenance, and it was not long ere the gathering wrath burst into a storm.

The necessary preliminary business which marks the opening of a Synod, was scarcely over, when the subject was introduced. 'At the afternoon meeting,' writes an eyewitness, 'Mr. Adam F——, minister at Logierait, stated that Mr. Erskine, in his sermon in the forenoon, had uttered some things which gave offence, and moved for investigation. He was immediately joined by Mr. M——, minister at Aberdalgie, a hot, violent man,—a plague on the Presbytery of Perth, and most active always in a bad cause. He was also joined by Mr. M——, then at Forteviot, now at St. Ninians, a man more smooth and subtle than his brother, but his hand still as deep in a course of defection. Mr. Robert C—— of Glendoig, advocate, elder, reasoned also very warmly for censuring Mr. Erskine; he is a man that follows the fashion of the present time; his principles and conduct in the Judicatories, appear to be of a piece.'\*

The matter was intrusted to a committee, that they might prepare the case for the consideration of the court. The committee reported next day to the Synod, that they had failed in obtaining from Mr. Erskine any acknowledgment of fault, and, at the same time, laid on the table a paper, containing what they considered exceptionable pas-

\* Ferrier's Memoirs of Rev. W. Wilson, p. 196.



sages in Mr. Erskine's sermon, which they accompanied with their own comments. The committee, however, had found it impossible, with all their ingenuity, to rest a specific charge on the excerpted passages, and felt themselves shut up to the necessity of presenting one of a general nature, the sum of which was, that Mr. Erskine had spoken disrespectfully of a large class of ministers, and of their procedure in the church courts.

'Warm reasonings' ensued, of three days' continuance, increasing in virulence as the discussion advanced, in the course of which it became evident that the prevailing party were resolved to visit upon this 'troubler of Israel' the offences of years, and to crush the spirit of faithful remonstrance and dauntless witness-bearing. It was in vain that Mr. Erskine, having with difficulty obtained a sight of the paper prepared against him by the committee, exposed the incorrect report which they had given of some of the phrases that he had used, and by showing the connexion in which the various excerpted passages had been introduced in his discourse, proved that the comments offered on them by the committee who had wrested them from their connexion, were uncandid and frivolous. It was in vain that Mr. Wilson of Perth reiterated the complaint that Mr. Erskine's words had been incorrectly reported, and that to condemn him for preaching against the Act of last Assembly, was not only to inflict serious injury upon an individual, but to introduce a new and obnoxious term of ministerial communion,—that no minister should preach against any Act of a General Assembly, even though he might be convinced in his conscience that it was unscriptural in principle and subversive of the liberty and purity of the church;—the Synod, by a majority of six votes, declared Mr. Erskine deserving of censure.

No sooner was this decision announced, than Mr. Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy entered his dissent and protest against it, in which he was immediately joined by Mr. Meik, the Moderator, Mr. Wilson of Perth, with ten other ministers and two ruling elders. Mr. Erskine himself pro-

tested and appealed to the next General Assembly, in which he was followed by his son-in-law, Mr. James Fisher of Kinclaven, after which Mr. Erskine retired, insisting that meanwhile all further procedure against him should be stopped. Undeterred by this formidable minority, and unchecked by Mr. Erskine's own appeal of the case to the revision of a higher court, the Synod proceeded in the cause, and gave it as their judgment that he should be rebuked and admonished to-morrow at their bar, on account of the passages in his sermon reported by the committee; and, in the event of his not being present to-morrow, that he should be called up at their meeting in April next, and rebuked and admonished there in terms of the sentence. It is one of the surest marks of a corrupt church when ecclesiastical offences are visited with greater severity than doctrinal errors or immoral acts.

Winter passed, and the Synod assembled at Stirling in April of the following year, but neither party showed any inclination to withdraw from the position they had assumed. The opponents of Mr. Erskine, still hoping to crush his spirit of bold resistance by ecclesiastical authority and the dread of consequences, showed every determination to carry out their measures against him with the utmost rigour; and even a petition from a number of his elders, urging a reversal of the sentence against him, was first refused to be transmitted by the Committee of Bills, and when laid on the table of the Synod itself, refused to be read. Mr. Erskine, on the other hand, convinced that God had intrusted to his hands important principles to vindicate, and precious and imperilled rights to assert, thought not of personal consequences, but set his face like a flint, knowing that to succumb in such circumstances was to betray. Mere power is an impotent thing when it has to deal with a good conscience and an honest heart. Showing respect to all the constitutional forms, Mr. Erskine obeyed the call of the Synod, and appeared before them; but when he saw them proceeding to execute their sentence of rebuke and admonition, he informed them that he adhered to his

appeal, and having with difficulty obtained permission to speak, read the following paper, immediately after which he withdrew:—

‘According to the utterance given by the Lord to me at Perth, I have delivered his mind, particularly with relation to some prevailing evils of the day, which to me are matter of confession, and therefore I dare not retract the least part of that testimony. I am heartily sorry that ever the Reverend Synod should have commenced a process against me for what I am persuaded was nothing else but truth, especially when they have never yet made it appear that I have in the least receded from the word of God, and our approved standards of doctrine, worship, discipline, or government. Every man hath his own proper gift of utterance, and according to the gift bestowed on me, so I expressed myself at Perth; and if I had given offence by any expressions uttered by me at that time, I should very willingly retract and beg pardon. But I hope my Reverend brethren will excuse me to say, that I am not yet convinced of any just ground for a rebuke and admonition.’

Thus ended the second scene in those movements which were gradually gathering around them the popular interest, and hurrying on to some momentous crisis. We are now to behold the cause transferred to the wider field, and maintained amid the still more hostile influences of the General Assembly.

No meeting of Assembly had been anticipated with such profound interest and eager anxiety since the Union, as that which convened at Edinburgh, May 3d, 1733. The Rev. John Gowdie, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, was chosen Moderator; the Marquis of Lothian sat as Commissioner. Two decisions which were given soon after the Assembly commenced its sittings, gave unequivocal indication of the spirit which prevailed among the reigning party, and coming immediately before the introduction of Mr. Erskine’s case, were generally understood to be intended to intimidate him and his supporters into abject acquiescence. They certainly proved the vital importance

to the interests of religion and liberty of the position he had assumed, and must have produced an earnest desire in every true friend of these endangered interests, that no influence might tempt him to withdraw or to recoil.

One of these was the case of the parish of Kingaldrum, to which a few heritors, not resident in the parish, and some of whom were not even members of the Scottish church, had lately presented an individual as minister. The presentee was intensely unacceptable to the parishioners of Kingaldrum, whose wishes had never been thought of as an element in the choice. Every elder in the parish opposed the settlement, and all the heads of families actively concurred in the opposition, with the exception of four, who remained neutral, a boy, a minor, whose guardian sided with the heritors, and one resident heritor, who afterwards retracted his vote, and joined with the parish in opposing the settlement. Yet the General Assembly sanctioned the appointment of the heritors, insisted that it should take effect as quite valid in itself, and in harmony with the Act of the last Assembly! This was surely to 'glory in their shame.'

The other case displays the same unscrupulous readiness on the part of the ecclesiastical rulers, to strain their authority to the farthest pitch of insult and oppression. A Mr. Robert Stark had been violently intruded on the parish of Kinross. In consequence of the disgraceful circumstances connected with his settlement, the majority of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, in whose bounds Kinross is situated, refused to receive and enrol him as a member of Presbytery; while the inhabitants of Kinross, disgusted by the tyranny which had forced upon them an unacceptable presentee, unanimously deserted his ministrations, and sought the enjoyment of Christian ordinances in the neighbouring parishes. This was quite a case to attract the sympathy and interest of the rulers in the Assembly. It did so. Those ministers of the Presbytery who had shrunk from recognising an intruded and obnoxious presentee, were sharply rebuked for their scruples, and commanded to meet

forthwith and judicially enrol Mr. Stark into their fellowship, on pain of yet severer censures; while they were prohibited by a special act, and with similar menaces, from administering the sacraments to any person from the parish of Kinross, without the consent of its minister. This was indeed to rule with a high hand; and it is difficult to say whether the sentence was more arbitrary in its aspects towards the Presbytery or towards the people. To the one it presented the alternative of enduring the heaviest ecclesiastical censures, or performing an act which, in the peculiar circumstances, must have savoured of farce and dissimulation. To the other it offered the choice of attending on the ministrations of a hireling whom they had every reason to despise, or of being treated as 'a heathen man and a publican.'

Mr. Erskine could not misapprehend the spirit of these Acts. They told him what he himself might expect in case of continued resistance, and were doubtless meant to overwhelm him with confusion and dismay. But there was no quailing at his heart as he looked around him on a frowning Assembly, and forward into a darkening future. The greater number of those, indeed, who had embarked in the cause now withdrew, either persuading themselves that they had sufficiently discharged their duty by their synodical dissents, or alarmed by the dread of consequences which they had not courage to meet. But when his case was called he was ready at the bar, and three friends were beheld by his side, prepared from henceforth to make his cause their own;—William Wilson, minister of Perth, Alexander Moncrieff, minister of Abernethy, and James Fisher, minister of Kinclaven.

The first step of the Assembly after the cause was introduced, at once declared the arbitrary and unconstitutional spirit that was to control its proceedings. Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff having claimed it as their right to be heard in support of their dissent from the deed of their own Synod, were peremptorily denied this reasonable demand; while the lips of Mr. Fisher were as effectually sealed by

the refusal of the Committee to transmit his reasons of appeal. Mr. Erskine alone was permitted to be heard in support of his appeal; and this was done in a document, which, for pointed brevity of statement, triumphant argument, clear elucidation of great principles, respectful address combined with independence of feeling, deserves to be ranked among the most valuable ecclesiastical documents of the age. Indeed, it is one of the good effects of such struggles as we are now describing, that they not only vindicate important privileges at the time, but by eliciting great principles and throwing them abroad upon the public mind, sow the seeds of future struggles and future triumphs. The history of one age, thus becomes the teacher of the next.

‘A watchman,’ he exclaims in one place, ‘must exoner himself upon the peril of his soul. ’Tis true he ought not knowingly to sound a false alarm. But whether is it safer for the city to have a false alarm sounded upon an apprehended danger, or to have the mouth of the watchman stopt that he cannot sound an alarm, when the danger is real and the city falling into the hands of the enemy?’

Again,—‘The Synod, according to the method of their procedure against me, seemed to look upon this act as a term of ministerial communion which it can by no means be, in regard it had no being, when the appellant or any other minister admitted to the ministry before its enactment, was ordained; and if this act be a term of ministerial communion, why not other acts? and so we shall have as many terms of communion as there are acts of Assembly.’

Again he says,—‘It cannot be supposed that any thinking man ever engaged to be subject (as was said) to all acts of Assembly that might take place after his subscription, unless they were agreeable to, and founded upon, the word of God.....Our subjection to judicatories is only in the Lord, from which no argument can be drawn for a sinful silence as to acts and constitutions, which seem to us to be against Christ’s interests and authority over his church.’



These defences had no effect upon the mind of Mr. Erskine's judges, except to aggravate in their opinion his original offence. By a majority of votes, the Assembly found the expressions vented by Mr. Erskine and contained in the minutes of the Synod's proceedings, with the answers thereto made by him, to be offensive, and to tend to disturb the peace and good order of the church; and 'therefore approve of the proceedings of the Synod, and appoint him to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar in order to terminate the process.'

The rebuke and admonition were administered accordingly, but could Mr. Erskine silently submit to the restraints which they imposed? This would virtually have been to fall from the noble testimony against public evils which he had been maintaining, to pledge himself to a crouching and cowardly silence in the case of future unconstitutional and unscriptural acts, and to fling from him the commission of contending for injured truth and vindicating violated rights, which the Providence of God had so evidently put into his hands. The intrepid Reformer did not hesitate about his course, but producing a paper in which he protested against the censure that had been inflicted on him, and declared his adherence to all the testimonies he had formerly emitted against the Act of 1732, craved in his own name and in that of his three brethren who stood beside him at the bar and had adhibited their written assent to it, that it might be publicly read and recorded in the minutes of the Assembly. This request was, of course, refused, on which the brethren left the paper on the table of the Assembly, and withdrew. It was in these words,—

'Although I have a very great and dutiful regard to the Judicatories of this church to whom I own my subjection in the Lord; yet in respect the Assembly have found me censurable and have tendered a rebuke and admonition to me for things I conceive agreeable unto, and founded upon, the word of God and our approved standards; I find myself obliged to protest against the said censure, as import-



ing that I have in my doctrine at the opening of the Synod of Perth, October last, departed from the word of God and the foresaid standards: and that I shall be at liberty to preach the same truths of God, and to testify against the same or like defections of this church, upon all proper occasions. And I do hereby adhere unto the testimonies I have formerly emitted against the Act of Assembly 1732, whether in the protest entered against it in open Assembly, or yet in my synodical sermon: craving this my protest and declaration to be insert in the records of Assembly, and that I may be allowed extracts thereof.'

It is evident that when the brethren quietly withdrew, from the Assembly after laying this protest upon its table they had not the most remote intention of formal separation from the Established Church, but that remaining in her communion, they meant to testify against public evils, in the use of that liberty for which they had protested. But on what trivial circumstances do the most important events often depend? 'Had the nose of Cleopatra been a little longer,' says Pascal in one of his pregnant sentences, 'it would have changed the history of the world.' And but for a seemingly insignificant occurrence, the Secession might never have occurred, and Mr Erskine and his friends have died in the bosom of the Established Church. The Assembly had already proceeded to other business, when the paper which Mr. Erskine had left, having fallen over the table, attracted the attention of a member of court,— 'Mr. James Naismith, minister at Dalmeny, a fiery man in the corrupt measures of that time.' As he perused the document, his countenance was observed to kindle with indignation, and no sooner had he finished its secret perusal, than he passionately called on the Assembly to stop and consider the insufferable insult which he reckoned had been cast upon them, in the contents of that paper. The protest was read by him with stentorian voice, the Assembly appeared all in a flame, and determined now to have recourse to summary measures, they instantly commanded their officer to seek out the four brethren, and cite them

to appear before the bar of the Assembly on the morrow. It was not till about an hour before midnight that they received their summons;—the Lord was ‘leading the blind by a way that they knew not.’

On the morrow the four brethren, in obedience to the summons of the Assembly, appeared at their bar. Without any question being addressed to them, they were at once instructed to retire with a Committee that was appointed to deal with them on the subject of their protest. That Committee soon returned, and studiously withholding the reasons assigned by the brethren, simply reported, that ‘they continued fully resolved to adhere to their paper and protest.’ And then the Assembly, as if eager to terminate the process, and resolved that nothing should be allowed to restrain them from the purpose of their heart, without allowing the parties who were so deeply interested in their decision to open their mouth at the bar, immediately ordained to the following effect:—‘That the four brethren appear before the Commission in August next, to express sorrow for their conduct and retract their protest; that in the event of their refusing to submit, the Commission is empowered and appointed to suspend them from the exercise of their ministry; and that if they shall then act contrary to the sentence of suspension, the Commission at their meeting in November or any subsequent meeting, is instructed to proceed to a higher censure.’

The very forms of justice were disregarded, in the present instance, by those haughty ecclesiastics. For respect even to the shadow and letter of justice, should evidently dispose those who sit in judgment, to allow the utmost latitude of defence to those who are cited before them, and whose interests are deeply involved in the decision. This is one of those forms which no circumstance should be allowed to violate, and which having their foundation in natural justice, have often proved the invaluable safeguards of human rights. What shall we think then of such a decision summarily passed against these four brethren, while all inquiry is foreclosed and defence inter-

dicted. Hasty decisions are a sure indication that faction or fear is sitting as judge. How true is the remark of Milton that, from the foundation of the world, error has never dared an open encounter with truth, or tyranny with an honest cause. Had the great poet-republican been present in the Scottish Assembly, and seen these four champions first gagged and then condemned, would not his own words have sprung to his lips, 'Presbyter is priest writ large.'

On the sentence being intimated to the brethren they offered to read a short paper as their joint speech, to the following effect:—'In regard the venerable Assembly have come to a positive sentence without hearing our defences, and have appointed the Commission to execute their sentence in August, in case we do not retract what we have done; we cannot but complain of this uncommon procedure, and declare that we are not at liberty to take this affair to an *avisandum*,'—*i. e.* to take the matter into further consideration. Then came the crowning act of these unscrupulous rulers, the mere imagination of which makes the blood still mantle on our cheeks. No sooner had they begun to read this paper, than the officer of the Assembly was ordered to exclude them from the house! Doubtless the intrepid witnesses 'went out from the midst of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.'—They had now reached the last turn in that long and winding avenue, at the end of which was liberty. Let us follow them to its termination.

A natural desire arises in our minds, to know something of the state of mind of these servants of God when they retired from the public struggles and contentions of Assemblies, to the more secret reflection of their own homes. How much better is the character of Paul understood, for example, when his epistles are placed side by side with the contemporary passages in the Acts of the Apostles. Something similar to this has been enjoyed in tracing previous parts of the contendings of these four brethren; and it is gratifying now to be able to present a passage which discloses

to us the secret feelings of Mr. Erskine at this juncture, and marks the calm composure with which he looked forward on the future. In closing the preface of his celebrated Synod-sermon, which issued from the press during the storm, he thus seeks to satisfy the anxious interest with which he knew his case was regarded by thousands. 'If any of the author's friends and well-wishers be afraid of further trouble to him upon account of this sermon; let them know that, through grace, he chooses rather to suffer with the oppressed members of Christ, than to enjoy all the ease and pleasure of those who oppress them in their spiritual liberties; which, being the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, will be reckoned for before the scene be ended.' Here was the hidden secret of his dauntless bearing in Assemblies and Commissions. 'He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.'

Mr. Erskine was not mistaken in supposing that his case was regarded by multitudes with deep and trembling interest; and this not more for his own sake, than for the sake of the integrity and peace of the Church, which they plainly saw the rash and tyrannical conduct of its rulers had now brought into imminent hazard. The consequence was, that when the month of August came, and the Commission assembled, numerous representations were laid upon its table, expressive of the most serious apprehensions, and earnestly pressing the importance of caution and delay. That from the Presbytery of Stirling, contained the following interesting testimony, 'Mr. Erskine's character is so established amongst the body of professors of this part of the Church, that we believe even the authority of an Assembly condemning him, cannot lessen it.' But only a small part of this representation was permitted to be read, while those from the presbyteries of Dunblane and Ellon, and from various town-councils and kirk-sessions, were treated with that supercilious contempt which gives to the proceedings of the ecclesiastical rulers at this period, whenever popular rights are concerned, the doubtful merit of system and consistency.

The treatment of the four brethren themselves, was in the same spirit. Feeling the extreme delicacy and importance of their position; unable, moreover, to shut their eyes to the unfriendly temper of the majority of their judges, they had wisely prepared written defences of their conduct, suited to the different characters which they sustained in the process, as appellants from, or protesters against, the decision of the Synod, which they proposed to lay upon the table as their representation. They were informed, however, that the Commission had resolved to read none of their papers, and that they were now required to answer separately and *viva voce* to the question, 'whether they were now willing to retract their protestation, and to declare their sorrow for their past conduct.' Mr. Erskine, to whom the question was first addressed, firmly replied that as it was the undoubted privilege of a person, when sisted before any court, to make his defence either in word or writing as he might think proper, he was not disposed to wave this right on the present occasion; and, therefore, insisted that the paper he had laid on the table, should be read and sustained as his answer to the question of the court. More than two hours were spent in seeking to draw from Mr. Erskine a *viva voce* reply, and when at length he was removed, the privilege was yielded to him by a reluctant vote.

At this time, there mingled among the spectators in the Commission, one who witnessed its present proceedings with overwhelming interest. He was then an unknown youth of nineteen, pursuing his studies at the University of Edinburgh, but had already become the subject of a divine change, through the reading of the introductory part of Luther's commentary on the Galatians. Having been present at several previous Assemblies and Commissions, the ingenuous but keen-eyed student had noticed with astonishment and disgust the doctrinal defections and tyrannical proceedings of the ecclesiastical rulers, and his sympathies had gradually been gathered around the few faithful men who had been struggling for years to stem the current.

The name of this youth was Adam Gib, who two years afterwards cast in his lot with Mr. Erskine and his friends, and, for half a century, was known as one of the most vigorous and unflinching defenders of their principles and cause. At the end of his own copy of his well-known work, still in the possession of his descendants,—‘The Display of the Secession Testimony,’ Mr. Gib has left, written with his own hand a description given with all the vividness of an eye-witness, of Mr. Erskine’s appearance on this occasion.

‘I saw Mr. Ebenezer Erskine,’ says he, ‘then standing at the bar in a most easy and undaunted, yea majestic appearance, amidst warm and brow-beating reasonings against the refusal which he then made, particularly by the Earl of Isla. Before the Commission found themselves obliged to reverse their forenoon resolution against receiving any written answers to their question, a proposal was agreed in for allowing him to read such parts of his representation as contained a direct answer to their question. The paper being then handed over to him, he entered upon the reading of it, beginning with the address and title. The Moderator immediately stopped him, telling that he was to read only such parts as contained a direct answer to the question. Mr. Erskine replied that these would come in due order. This produced new reasonings, which issued in his being allowed to read the whole paper. And he did so in a very deliberate manner, with a very audible voice; Mr. Archibald Rennie, who was next year intruded into the parish of Muckart, holding the candle to him, for it was then late.’

The ‘warm and brow-beating reasonings’ here described, were such as these brethren had often been called to bear, in their successive appearances before the Church-courts; and we understand human nature but slightly, if we do not perceive that such a course of treatment, extended through a lengthened period, is really more difficult to bear than one short and splendid scene of suffering. How much of the true spirit of the Christian martyr may



there be, without the imposing solemnities of the scaffold or the stake!

The representation by Mr. Erskine, which was the only one permitted to be read, was one of those masterly productions of which not a few were produced during this contest. It has been remarked of a great statesman of the last age, that in speaking on any subject, his train of observation was commonly such as not only to bear conclusively on his present object, but to embody great principles of wider application and imperishable value; resembling the river which while it is bearing the richly freighted vessel to its destined port, is at the same time silently depositing particles of gold upon its banks. We confess to have been struck with this in more than one of the ecclesiastical documents of this period; and that which Mr. Erskine now laid on the table of the Commission, would, in various parts of it, warrant the remark.

It exhibits, in a series of uncommonly perspicuous and well connected paragraphs, the principles taught in the Bible respecting the kingly office of Christ,—the independent and spiritual nature of his kingdom,—the adaptation of its laws and ordinances to the welfare of his subjects,—the merely administrative nature of all church power,—the fallibility of church judicatories,—the right of private judgment, and the duty binding on the members of the church, and especially on its office-bearers, to protest against, and seek to have removed, those perversions of church authority whose tendency is to corrupt the truths of this spiritual kingdom, or to degrade and enslave its people. On these principles he especially vindicates the course which he and his brethren had taken against the Act of Assembly, 1732, and shows how they are unable, with the approval of their consciences, to withdraw the protest, or to silence the testimony which they have raised against it.

As might be anticipated from the experience of the past, his noble and conclusive vindication had no effect upon the minds of the majority of Mr. Erskine's judges.



The Commission 'suspended the four brethren from the exercise of the ministerial function and all the parts thereof;' though it is pleasing to add that several ministers and elders, members of Commission, dissented from the deed.

No sooner was the sentence formally intimated, than the four brethren protested in their own name and in that of all who should adhere to them,—That this sentence was in itself null and void; that it would be lawful and warrantable for them to exercise their ministry as hitherto they had done, and as if no such censure had been inflicted; and that if in consequence of this sentence, any minister or probationer should exercise any part of their pastoral work, the same would be held and reputed as a violent intrusion upon their pastoral labours. Papers were at the same time given in by some of the elders of their respective congregations, in which they protested against the sentence, and declared their continued and devoted adherence to their ministers. Thus did the rent widen, by every new stroke of ecclesiastical vengeance.

It was not a time for Mr. Erskine and his friends to compromise their position, by refraining to do in fact what they had in their protest declared their continued right and warrant to do. Accordingly, we find them at once fearlessly betaking themselves to the discharge of all their pastoral functions. Mr. Erskine on his way home from the Commission, assisted his friend Mr. Kid of Queensferry, one of the Marrowmen, in the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, and on the Sabbath morning gave out the following lines of the fifty-first psalm, on which he is said to have thrown out some touching observations;

*'My closed lips, O Lord, by thee  
Let them be opened;  
Then shall thy praises by my mouth  
Abroad be published.'*\*

We can almost suppose that one of the sustaining thoughts that would arise to the mind of the venerable witness, was

\* Frazer's Life of E. Erskine, p. 383.

that he was not a sufferer for his sins but for the truth, and doubtless this was one of those periods, to which he afterwards looked back with such grateful and adoring recollections from his death-bed, when he said, 'I have always found my times of severe affliction my best times. Many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them—a good God, a good conscience, a good cause.'\*

During the three months that intervened between the period of their suspension and the next meeting of the Commission in November, before which they were summoned again to appear, the interest in the cause of the four brethren, had extended itself far and wide throughout the land. Every one saw that a crisis was at hand, and yet no one could tell how it would terminate, and in what way it would affect the interests of the brethren, or the integrity and future prosperity of the church. Men therefore felt anxious to delay a crisis, whose consequences when it came might be so disastrous, and they even hoped that by its being delayed, it might in some way or other at length be averted. The consequence was that when November came and the Commission assembled, addresses and resolutions were presented in their behalf from seven different Synods, imploring that they might be treated with clemency and forbearance, and that the court would abstain from proceeding to inflict a higher censure. Several presbyteries also petitioned in the same spirit, and one had even courage enough to express it as their opinion that the sentence of suspension already inflicted, had been a 'stretching of church authority.' Which then shall give way? Might or right? Shall ecclesiastical tyranny relax its grasp? or shall enlightened conscience fling from it its testimony?

Obedient to the instructions of the Assembly, the four brethren appeared before the Commission in November, but with no tone or attitude of unworthy compromise. On the contrary, they at once intimated their unswerving

\* Frazer's Life of E. Erskine, p. 459.

adherence to all their former representations and protests, and acknowledged that since their suspension in August, they had exercised all the parts of their ministerial office, as if they had been under no such censure. The numerous petitions that had been laid on the table of the Commission urging a lenient course, as well as expressing dread of the consequences of unrelaxed severity, induced many members to insist that the process against the brethren should not, in the meantime, be prosecuted further. The question was accordingly put to the Commission, and it was carried only by the casting vote of the Moderator and amid numerous dissents and protests, that they should proceed immediately to a higher censure.

At this anxious juncture, another committee was appointed to meet with the suspended ministers, with instructions to endeavour, if possible, to correct their mistakes and persuade them to a dutiful submission. With some, this arrangement doubtless originated in an honest desire to put a check upon undue severity and to avert the calamities which they saw impending over the church; with others, it was doubtless intended as a show of leniency to the public, and if possible to bring the brethren into a false position; with others, it was the suggestion of a fear that shrinks from the fruits of its own acts, when it beholds them near,—‘willing to wound and yet afraid to strike.’ And men of principle are far more in danger of being entangled by these subtle nets, than of falling before a more direct assault, as the annals of church history sadly demonstrate in a thousand instances. But happily, Mr. Erskine and his friends were not to add another painful example. No proposal was made to them which did not involve a dangerous concession and even a sinful compromise; and alive to the fact that not only their own personal interest and character were now involved in their position, but the general interests of truth and liberty, they determined to avoid the slightest departure from the principles on which their opposition to the church-courts was founded, or to endanger the great cause which Providence

had intrusted to them, for what was likely to prove a dishonest and hollow peace. They accordingly declared themselves incapable of adopting the proposals of the committee.

The crisis had now come, and the rent in the Scottish Church, was seen widening even to its foundations. On the committee's reporting that the four brethren continued of the same mind as formerly, the Commission immediately proceeded to the final determination of the case. The question was stated thus, 'Loose the relation of the said four ministers to their respective charges, declare them no longer ministers of this church, and prohibit all ministers of this church from employing them in any ministerial function; or, depose them *simpliciter*;'—when it carried *loose* by a great majority, those members who had formerly voted against proceeding to a higher censure, not being able to vote consistently on either side.

Looked at from the distance of more than a century, and seen in many of its results, this decision must be regarded as one of no common moment, and therefore it is natural that we should interweave with our narrative the very terms in which it was announced and recorded. On the 16th of November, 1733, the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, passed sentence against the four protesting ministers in the following words:— 'The Commission of the General Assembly did, and hereby do, loose the relation of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine minister at Stirling, Mr. William Wilson minister at Perth, Mr. Alexander Moncrieff minister at Abernethy, and Mr. James Fisher minister at Kinclaven, to their said respective charges; and do declare them no longer ministers of this church; and do prohibit all ministers of this church to employ them, or any of them, in any ministerial function. And the Commission do declare the churches of the said Mr. Erskine, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Moncrieff, and Mr. Fisher, vacant, from and after the date of this sentence. And appoints that letters from the Moderator and extracts of this sentence be sent to the several presbyteries within whose

bounds the said ministers have had their charges, appointing them, as they are hereby appointed, to cause intimate this sentence in the foresaid several churches, any time betwixt and the first of January next. And also that notice be sent by letters from the moderator of this Commission, to the magistrates of Perth and Stirling, to the Sheriff-principal of Perth, and Baillie of the regality of Abernethy.’

Thus were these faithful servants of God cast out of the church. While it had only been after long delay and with much reluctance, that these rulers had been brought to suspend from his ministerial functions one who had boldly blasphemed the name of Jesus and taught others to do it, and while they had allowed him to remain in undisturbed possession of all his ecclesiastical emoluments,—these holy men and faithful witnesses, who had vented no heresy, who stood unchallenged with any immoral act, who had done violence to no constitutional law, whose only fault had been their faithful testifying against repeated and growing defections in doctrine and government, their endeavouring to bring back the church to that purer model, to gain which her first martyr had burned and her last martyr bled, and especially their continuing to protest and refusing to be silent against a measure which even the most unscrupulous partisan of modern times will admit to have been unconstitutionally passed and irregularly imposed, were driven from a church whose doctrines they loved, and whose order they venerated, denuded of their office, exposed to penury, and branded with reproach. Had the majority of those rulers been as zealous for the honour of Christ, as for their own authority, how different, in both cases, would have been their sentence.

The reading of the sentence, carried a pang of sorrow to the heart of some of the most faithful of those ministers who had sat in the Commission. They felt that, with many of the rulers around them who had joined in passing the unrighteous decree, their only bond of connexion was ecclesiastical and external; while with those whom they now

saw driven forth, it was spiritual, endearing, and perpetual. No sooner, therefore, was the sentence read, than seven ministers lodged their protest against it, declaring their right to complain of it to any subsequent Assembly, to testify against the various acts of Assembly that had occasioned it, and to hold communion with their 'dear brethren,' as if no such Act had ever been passed against them. Of these seven ministers, three afterwards cast in their lot with the four brethren; two others, Mr. Gabriel Wilson of Maxton, and Mr. Henry Davidson of Galashiels, 'wearied with the contentious chicanery' of successive Assemblies and Commissions, soon after withdrew from the communion of the Scottish church, and formed a church at Maxton on the congregational model; and one Mr. Currie of Kinglassie, became the bitter asperser of the four brethren, for which he is said to have been rewarded with substantial gifts.\*

Immediately after this, the four brethren were called, and the sentence of their expulsion from the church announced to them. Their minds were fully prepared for the course which it now became them to take. They first read, and then handed to the clerk the following protest, which, as it not only stands connected with so momentous a crisis in the personal history of the four brethren, but forms the basis of the Secession, must be regarded as a document of public and permanent interest. Its tenor is as follows:—

‘EDINBURGH, *November 16th*, 1733.

We hereby adhere to the protestation formerly entered before this Court, both at their last meeting in August, and when we appeared first before this meeting. And further, we do protest in our own name, and in the name of all and every one in our respective congregations adhering to us, that, notwithstanding of this sentence passed against us,

\* The General Assembly of 1741, sanctioned a grant to Mr. Currie of sixty pounds sterling, as a reward for his pamphlets written against the Seceding ministers. Struthers' History of Scotland, II., p. 57.



our pastoral relation shall be held and reputed firm and valid. And likewise we protest, that notwithstanding of our being cast out from ministerial communion with the Established Church of Scotland, we still hold communion with all and every one who desire with us to adhere to the principles of the true Presbyterian covenanted Church of Scotland, in her doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, and particularly with all who are groaning under the evils, and who are affected with the grievances we are complaining of, and who are, in their several spheres, wrestling against the same. But in regard the prevailing party in this Established Church who have now cast us out from ministerial fellowship with them, are carrying on a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles, and particularly are suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness in testifying against the present backslidings of the church, and inflicting censure upon ministers for witnessing, by protestations and otherwise, against the same: Therefore we do, for these and many other weighty reasons, to be laid open in due time, protest that we are obliged to MAKE A SECESSION FROM THEM, and that we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them. And in like manner we do protest, that it shall be lawful and warrantable for us to exercise the keys of doctrine, discipline, and government, according to the word of God and Confession of Faith, and the principles and constitutions of the Covenanted Church of Scotland, as if no such censure had been passed upon us; upon all which we take instruments. And we hereby appeal unto the first free, faithful, and reforming General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

(Signed)

‘EBENEZER ERSKINE.

‘WILLIAM WILSON.

‘ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.

‘JAMES FISHER.’

A glance at this important document, may serve to correct more than one popular mistake that has been allowed

to obtain extensive credence, and in so far to diminish, in general opinion, the value of the steps which these servants of God now felt themselves constrained to take. Thousands suppose that patronage was the sole grievance in which the Secession originated, whereas it is distinctly referred in this authoritative document to a lengthened course of defection, both in doctrine and government, such as we have endeavoured in the preceding pages to trace,—a defection rendered insufferable, at length, by the closing up of every constitutional channel by which faithful testimony might be maintained against it, and its corrupting current stemmed and dried up. The four brethren seceded, as they themselves express it, ‘for many weighty reasons.’

Nor will any one who conscientiously acquaints himself with the real facts of the case, ever be guilty of the bold injustice of associating Ebenezer Erskine and his friends with those dreaming schismatics who aspire after a state of ecclesiastical perfection perhaps not attainable on earth, or with those troublesome sectaries who mistake the spirit of division for the spirit of purity, whose pertinacious zeal is generally proportioned to the insignificance of the object for which they contend, and who would withdraw the churches from their high vocation, to wonder at them, while they sit at their chosen and congenial exercise of ‘weighing atoms and dividing straws.’ Ebenezer Erskine and his associates were not sectaries but reformers. They separated from a degenerate church to carry on a work of reformation without her, when every constitutional means of promoting that work within her pale, had been wrested from their hands. They disobeyed their ecclesiastical rulers, when obedience to them would have been dishonour to Christ. The alternatives set before them were unfaithful silence or expulsion, and they nobly and instantly preferred the latter. If they are condemned, it is only on principles that would condemn the Reformers and the Puritans,—principles that would raze the very foundations of Protestantism, and overwhelm the bulwarks of religious liberty.

Looking back upon the moment when these four brethren walked forth from the presence of that court which had so rashly and wickedly condemned and expelled them, we can almost imagine their feelings to have resembled those of Calvin when banished from his native land. 'I am driven forth,' said he, 'out of my native land. Every step to its borders costs me tears. But since the truth may not dwell in France, neither can I. Her destiny is mine.'\* Not that they did not gladly own that there were 'dear brethren,' whom they had left behind them, who loved the truth; this is owned in the words of their protest, which not more attests their fidelity than their charity. But the prevailing character of the rulers in the church was different, as had been proved by their measures, and therefore it was that they had 'come out from among them and been separate.'

There is considerable danger of our not forming a sufficiently high estimate of the self-denial and the faith manifested in the movement which we are now describing. To judge of it aright, we must look at it, not from the midst of present scenes and modern sentiments, but from amid the scenes and sentiments of the age in which it took place. Then that which in our day would stand little above an act of commonplace virtue, will be seen to rise at once to the dignity of high moral heroism. The Seceders were venturing upon what, in Scotland at least, was an untried experiment, whose consequences to themselves they could not possibly forecast. There was a mysterious grandeur, too, around the national church in the eyes of the multitudes in those times, which all its defection and corruption had not sufficed to dispel, while every thing like separation was confounded in the minds of indiscriminating thousands with schism. They beheld the men of power and rank joining with those who sat in the high places of ecclesiastical authority in frowning upon their conduct, nor could

\* Life of John Calvin, by P. Henry of Berlin. Bibliotheca Sacra, 11., p. 500.

they be sure that these would not speedily invoke upon them the vengeance of the civil power. Their movement, moreover, whatever might be its moral grandeur, wanted that external magnitude which tends to awaken sympathy and to impress with awe; nor had that enlightened public opinion yet been called into being and elevated to power, which, in our own day, is the grand court of appeal from the decisions of tyranny and injustice, and which sooner or later reverses them all. Yet amid the frowns of power, and with the consciousness of weakness, surrounded with all the difficulties of an untried experiment, uncheered by the loud and universal voice of popular acclaim, and with no earthly prospect seemingly before them but that of reproach and want, did these four brethren, believing that they heard the voice of God, and that He had given them a commission to discharge and a testimony to bear, 'go forth like Abraham, not knowing whither they went.' Who would be ashamed of such a noble ancestry!

We are aware that it has become the fashion, in some quarters, to mock at the idea of a *historic church*, but the wisdom or the folly of thus mocking, altogether depends on the meaning we attach to the phrase. If it be meant by it that the authority of the founders of a denomination is to be final, that their very errors are to be stereotyped and themselves canonized, and that their children and descendants are to be restrained from taking any step in advance of their discoveries and attainments, then are we prepared to become mockers too. But what Protestant has ever used the word with such an unprotestant meaning? The phrase has another sense, at once protestant and holy. Are there not such things as transmitted duties as well as transmitted privileges? May not the providence of God, in the events of a particular country, visibly raise up a particular denomination, whose special work it shall be to assert and vindicate great truths and invaluable rights, until they shall have triumphed in a universal acceptance? And may there not be hallowed associations connected with the rise of that church, and with its first assertion of those princi-

ples, which it shall be at once the advantage and the duty of succeeding ages to cherish and hold sacred? The man who should deny this, would show that he knew little either of human nature or of the laws of God's providential administration, and in seeking to show himself liberal would only prove himself absurd. Historical recollections, such as those, for example, which stand connected with the origin of the Secession, are like the venerable elms and stately cedars which surround some ancient mansion, whose roots are interwoven with its foundations, whose branches add to its beauty and defence, and beneath whose ample shadow it is pleasant for the children who inhabit the mansion, often to converse and meditate. We have no sympathy with the Gothic violence that would level these associations with the dust, or with that shallow wisdom which, in looking forward on the future, would condemn the past.

## CHAPTER III.

### CONSOLIDATION OF THE SECESSION.

The Three other Fathers—Comparison of Portraits—Anecdote—Gairney Bridge—The Associate Presbytery—Wisdom with courage—The Extra-judicial Testimony—Grounds of Secession as laid by its founders—Alarm in the Assembly—Excitement among the people—Semblance of reform—Censures removed—The Four Brethren deliberate—Refusal to return—Reasons—Assembly of 1735, the mask on—Assembly of 1736, the mask becoming transparent—Organization—Progress—The Judicial Testimony—Accessions—Ralph Erskine—The Porteous mob—Act of Parliament—General submission—New accessions—Assembly of 1737, the mask falls off—Assembly of 1738, the Libel—Assembly of 1739, The Declinature—The Eight Brethren and the Assembly—The Deposition—Scenes in the parishes of the deposed ministers—The last cord severed.

HAVING thus described the act of Secession, it may reasonably be expected that, in entering on our present chapter, which is intended to narrate the infant struggles of the new body, we should devote a few paragraphs to brief notices of the three brethren who were associated with Mr. Erskine in the important movement, and afterwards contributed so much by their wisdom, eloquence, energy and prayer, to its consolidation. The materials that have descended to supply the substance of such notices are not abundant. The Fathers of the Secession simply following the dictates of principle, could not forecast the remoter consequences of their measures, and probably never dreamed of the magnitude and influence to which the new ecclesiastical community they were forming would eventually grow; and there is no reason to suppose that their contemporaries and followers looked into the future with more sanguine anticipation or prophetic certainty. This



was not the state of mind to ensure the preservation of abundant memorials. Besides, men when they are deeply in earnest forget themselves, and doubtless these sincere and simple-minded Reformers, struggling through a long series of years to preserve the lustre of dishonoured truth, or to restore betrayed rights, were the last to think of picturesque attitude or dramatic effect. Even the reminiscences that have descended, it is neither our intention nor our province to exhaust. This interesting work has been committed to other hands, and all that we intend is to select a few such facts as shall make our readers familiar with the mental features of the men whose movements we are tracing, and by showing that the course pursued by them in seceding was in harmony with the whole current of their previous life, expose the recklessness of those writers who for want of an explanation more suitable to their prejudices have, in utter ignorance or perversity, referred the Secession to disappointment on the part of its founders, or vindictiveness, or spleen.

WILLIAM WILSON,\* whose name immediately follows that of Ebenezer Erskine in the Deed of Secession, was the son of parents who had both been sufferers for conscience sake, in those years of imprisonment, confiscation, and bloodshed, which had preceded the Revolution. His father, Mr. Gilbert Wilson, a pious man and a Presbyterian, on account of his refusal to conform, had, under the reign of the second Charles, been deprived of his paternal acres, and even his moveable goods; and subsequently, as the persecution grew hotter, and its agents more numerous and unscrupulous, had been compelled to seek concealment during a whole winter in the bleak moorlands of Mearns; and afterwards to flee to the hospitable shores of Holland. His mother, the daughter of a landed proprietor in Forfarshire, had for the same reason been disowned and disinherited by her proud and intolerant parent. Gratitude for the blessings of the Revolution which at length dawned

\* Born at Glasgow, Nov. 9, 1690.

upon Scotland led them to dedicate their son, from his birth, to the Christian ministry.

This dedication was, at a very early period, owned of God. From the pages of a Diary, which, after the lapse of nearly a hundred years, the laborious application of a descendant unexpectedly succeeded in deciphering, he is found to have entered into secret and solemn covenant with God at the early age of fourteen, and subsequent pages of the same interesting document, afford the most pleasing evidence of that simple reliance on the divine atonement, that cheerful self-dedication, that sensitive shrinking from the very thought of sin, that frequent and solitary musing on heavenly themes, and close walking with God, which are the best indications of a flourishing piety, and the surest harbingers of an eminent ministry.

Mr. Wilson's preparatory studies were pursued with such systematic application and avidity that he scarcely allowed himself time for bodily rest, in consequence of which he had obtained, at a comparatively early period, a very extensive and accurate acquaintance with the writers on systematic theology, especially those of the Dutch school, excelled the greater number of the ministers of his age in his mastery of the languages in which the scriptures were written, and became such a proficient in Latin, that throughout life he could speak it with fluency and ease. While ardently pursuing these preparatory studies, the principle of the young student was severely put to the proof by the offer of a relative to make him heir to the large maternal possessions in Forfarshire, of which his mother had been disinherited on account of her faith, on condition of his abandoning the thought of becoming a Presbyterian clergyman, and assuming the profession of Episcopacy,—an offer which he resisted with such instant decision as effectually secured against its ever being repeated. This was fit training for a Secession Father.

By the time that he had concluded his theological curriculum, the party in the Church of Scotland that opposed the rights of the people, and were unfriendly to evangelical

truth and vital piety, had in many presbyteries become the majority; in consequence of which young men of earnest religion began to find difficulty in procuring license to preach. This was the case with Mr. Wilson in his native Presbytery of Glasgow. It belongs to the province of the biographer however rather than to ours, to describe the various forms in which this malign influence pursued him, first casting obstacles in the way of his admission to examinations and trials, and afterwards quickened and directed by the heretical Professor Simson, seeking to prevent his settlement over the parish of Dalry in Ayrshire, to which the eager and unanimous voice of the people invited him. His principle was only strengthened by this ordeal of opposition, and he waited patiently until providence should present to him an open door. Such an open door was already provided, for soon after he received a unanimous invitation from the Town Council and Session of Perth, accompanied by the concurring suffrages of the people, to become the third minister of that city. He was accordingly ordained over this important charge Nov. 1, 1716, where he continued to exercise a ministry of great influence, acceptability, and success, up to the time of the Secession. The renowned Christian soldier and patriot, Colonel Gardiner, was a frequent and cherished member of Mr. Wilson's family-circle, as we know him to have also been in the hallowed circle of Dr. Doddridge at Northampton.\*

As he had just entered on his ministry at the commencement of the Marrow controversy, Mr. Wilson felt himself restrained by his youth and inexperience from taking a prominent place in that momentous struggle. But he watched it from the first with intense interest, and was present from the beginning at the prayers and deliberations of the friends of the Marrow.

\* Remarkable passages in the Life of Colonel Gardiner by Doddridge. Also Sermon by Doddridge on Rev. ii. 10. preached on occasion of the death of Colonel Gardiner.

In the later contests in behalf of Christian truth and popular right, we have seen him gradually coming into prominence; and at length, when decided measures became necessary, and when many, through the influence of an unworthy fear or a temporizing policy, withdrew from the struggle, he was found in that little band of faithful men who were ready to follow conscience into whatever sacrifices and perils it might lead them, and into whose hands God was about to commit the guardianship of interests of no common value. In every great movement, men soon find their appropriate sphere of action, and Mr. Wilson's peculiar gifts and habits immediately decided his vocation in the new ecclesiastical community. He was the calm thinker, the wise counsellor, the man of business in the infant church. The greater number of its early public documents were the production of his pen; and in his 'Defence of the Reformation-principles of the Church of Scotland,' the most complete and triumphant vindication of the Secession that has ever been written, he proved himself in his command of temper, in his luminous argument, in his perfect mastery of the merits and details of his subject, and in the ease with which he detected and exposed the sophistries of assailants, one of the ablest controversialists of his age.\* Some of the facts that are to be embodied in the present chapter, will more fully illustrate his character.

ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF,† whose name stands third in the list of the four brethren, was well worthy to occupy that position of honour which belongs to those who 'suffer shame for the name of Christ.' His forefathers for several generations, had been the proprietors of Culfargie an extensive estate on the banks of the Earn in Perthshire, and one of his ancestors, like the father of William Wilson, had suffered confiscation and exile for conscience sake, in the days of Charles II. The roots of the Secession thus go back at once to the struggles of the Scottish covenant and of English puritanism.

\* Ferrier's Memoirs of W. Wilson, *passim*.

† Born July 1695.

Mr. Moncrieff's parents were persons of eminent piety, so that from his youth he enjoyed the inestimable privilege of religious education and example. This advantage was not lost upon the young man, for at a very early period he became the subject of deep religious impressions, and at the age of seventeen these impressions appear to have matured into a divine change. This change was followed by an unreserved dedication of himself to the ministry of the gospel, his sense of the grandeur and responsibility of which gave the best promise of success in the discharge of its duties. 'I hope,' says he in his diary, 'God is putting on my clothes and fitting me out for going in the quality of his ambassador, which is far sweeter to me than if he were to encircle my head with an earthly crown.' 'Do not I long, oh Lord, if thou wilt give me thy own call and be with me, to have the happiness of commending Christ to others? Oh! commend him effectually to my own soul.'\*

Having completed a course of philosophical and theological study at the university of St. Andrews, he sought to accomplish himself still more perfectly for the functions of the ministry by a course of foreign study, and sailing from Scotland in 1716 for Leyden in Holland, placed himself under the tuition of the celebrated Markius in the university of that city, where he prosecuted his studies with all the intense assiduity of an ardent and pious mind. While residing at this foreign seat of learning, he watched with much anxiety the progress of ecclesiastical affairs in Scotland, and having heard of the prosecution raised against Professor Simson for his erroneous tenets, and been apprized of the time when it was likely to be taken up by the Assembly, discovered at once the strength of his piety and his zeal for truth, by setting apart a portion of time to supplicate the direction of God to the Assembly in this particular emergency.

Returning to Scotland, Mr. Moncrieff was soon after-

\* Christian Magazine, viii. 94.

wards invited to the pastoral care of Abernethy in Perthshire, where he was accordingly ordained, in harmony with the wishes of the parishioners, in 1720. He found the church, at the period of his entering on his pastorate, in the heat of the Marrow controversy; and though a difference of opinion with the Marrowmen in regard to some of the details of their procedure, prevented him from formally joining himself to their ranks, all his doctrinal convictions and sympathies were with the movement. A few years after, his zeal for purity of doctrine and native intrepidity of character became manifest in connection with the issue of the second process against Professor Simson. Dissatisfied with the sinful leniency of the sentence passed by the General Assembly on that occasion, he craved liberty, though not a member of court, to express his sentiments, and, on the floor of the house, declared his disappointment and alarm that one who had impugned a fundamental doctrine of the gospel had been so feebly and inadequately condemned;—a declaration which he soon afterwards followed by the publication of an elaborate and learned treatise in defence of our Lord's Supreme Divinity.

This last act gave significant indication of that intrepid conscientiousness which was to mark the whole of his future life. We have already seen him joining with Mr. Erskine in his protest against the sentence of the Synod of Stirling and Perth, passing with him from the Synod to the Assembly, and standing by him in all his subsequent processes at the bar of Assemblies and Commissions, and at length cast out, grasping and sustaining along with him the standard raised against the impurity and tyranny of the Scottish Establishment. This fearless and unhesitating following out of his convictions in the face of all difficulties and dangers, seems to have been the distinguishing feature of this third Father among the honoured Four.

With this fearless intrepidity in his intercourse with man, Mr. Moncrieff combined in a remarkable degree the spirit of prayer. Not satisfied with the morning and evening seasons of retirement for devotion, he seized upon



frequent opportunities during the day ; every event seemed to afford him an errand upwards, and when at any time a convenient opportunity did not occur for retirement, he had recourse to ejaculatory petitions, and at his common meals, or in the midst of conversation or preaching, was observed to pause and 'dart up' a brief request to heaven. He resembled those inhabitants of the deep which cannot remain long beneath the surface of the waters at a time, but must come up frequently to breathe. 'See,' said a woman to her neighbour on occasion of one of these short devotional pauses in his preaching, 'Culfargie\* is away to heaven, and has left us all sitting here.' Ardent in temperament like Nehemiah, this Founder of the Secession, like him also, laid the foundations of the wall in prayer.†

Of JAMES FISHER, the last and youngest of the four brethren, the reminiscences are the least abundant. Born on the 23d day of January, 1697, at Barr in Ayrshire, of which parish his father Thomas Fisher was minister, he was ordained minister of the parish of Kinclaven, Perthshire, in the beginning of the year 1726. He early became alive to the imminent perils to which the interests of religion were exposed through the course of doctrinal corruption and tyranny pursued by the dominant party in the Scottish Church, and soon attached himself to that band of faithful men whom he beheld struggling against the swelling current, and striving to bring back the church to the purity and freedom of better times. He was one of those six ministers who met in 1731 to consider what measures it might be necessary to adopt for the accomplishment of these desirable ends, and who prepared the Representation that was presented to the next General Assembly, complaining of grievances, and craving their

\* The name of the paternal estate into the possession of which Mr. Moncrieff, some time before this, had come. Scottish readers do not need to be told how common it is in many parts of Scotland to designate landed proprietors by the name of their estates. The custom was still more common a century ago.

† Christian Magazine for March and April 1804.

redress.\* We have seen the fate of that faithful document and of others conceived and presented in a similar spirit. We have also witnessed the noble steadfastness with which he stood by Mr. Erskine in the 'warm reasonings' and 'browbeatings' of church courts, and cast in his lot with him when older men drew back, content to purchase liberty at the price of worldly advantage.

Contemporary writers describe Mr. Fisher as a man of uncommon elevation and spirituality of mind, and traditional recollections represent his public ministrations, especially after he was transferred to the wider field of Glasgow,† as unsurpassed either in sentiment, diction, or manner by any preacher of the age. The theology of Scotland owes him a deep and permanent debt of gratitude, as the principal author of that elaborate and comprehensive system of catechetical divinity which was prepared at a later period of his life and which popularly bears his name.‡

On the whole, were we called on to mark the distinguishing qualities in each of the Fathers of the Secession, we should speak of Ebenezer Erskine as the man of pulpit eloquence, who was most fitted by his years, experience, readiness in debate, and nobly majestic appearance to be the leader in an important and difficult movement;—of William Wilson as the man of prudent deliberation, 'looking before and after,' putting his check upon all unnecessary and fruitless action and undignified violence, labouring and thinking much in secret, and doing far more than to superficial onlookers he might seem to do;—of Alexander Moncrieff as the man whose bold and ardent spirit never thought of difficulty when it had found out duty, and who was peculiarly fitted to urge on the hesitating,

\* Frazer's *Life of E. Erskine*, pp. 496—500.

† October 8, 1741.

‡ He bore his share in the preparation of the first part of the *Synod's Catechism*; while the whole of the second part is the production of his pen. There is some reason to hope that this standard work will appear in the present series, edited by one singularly competent for the task.

and to prevent a wise caution from degenerating into a temporizing expediency; and of James Fisher as combining in himself much of the pulpit eloquence of one Father and much of the business habits of another, and, when we add to this his uncommon spirituality of mind, as unconsciously preparing to seize the descending mantle of these elder Fathers whom he was destined long to survive,\* and to carry on the cause of the Secession when they had gone up to their reward.

The well-known anecdote that has been preserved of Mr. Wilson, seems to establish the general accuracy of the mental portraiture which we have thus attempted to give of the Fathers of the Secession. Conversing with his friends in that spirit of easy pleasantry with which the best and busiest minds find it useful at times to unbend themselves, it was asked to what they might best compare the four brethren. Various comparisons were suggested. At length, when the question was proposed to Mr. Wilson, he replied that he did not see anything they could be better compared to, than the four living creatures in Ezekiel's vision. 'Our brother Mr. Erskine has the face of a man. Our friend Mr. Moncrieff has the face of a lion. Our neighbour Mr. Fisher has the face of an eagle. And as for myself, I think you will all own, that I may claim to be the ox, for, as you know, the laborious part of the business falls to my share.† Majesty, courage, spirituality, patient industry, are the qualities evidently pointed at in this stroke of pleasantry.

Having thus looked at the countenances of the four brethren, and as it were made ourselves familiar with their features, we shall now be prepared to follow their steps with the greater interest from the door of the Commission where we beheld them, at the conclusion of our last chapter, leave their protest and proclaim their secession. Their circumstances were new, difficult, and untried. No

\* Died September 28th, 1775.

† Ferrier's Memoirs of W. Wilson, p. 357.

instance had ever occurred in which men were driven from the fellowship of a church for contending for the purity of its recognised constitution; they were therefore without the guiding lights of historic precedent. The course they had taken, moreover, was such as to turn all eyes to their procedure; and one rash step taken at this period of weakness and inexperience, in the face of an organized, vigilant, and powerful majority in the Assembly, would prove disastrous at once to themselves and to their cause. How often, alas! have injustice and tyranny driven good men into extremes, and changed the wise Reformer into the factious and indiscriminating sectary. It was not so with Mr. Erskine and his associates. The first step taken by them was worthy of men who felt themselves intrusted by Providence with an important stewardship, and knew that it was only by his blessing that they could rightly fulfil it. They entreated not the favour of princes and magistrates, but like Ezra and his devout companions by the river Ahava, ‘afflicted themselves before God to seek of Him a right way.’

On the 5th day of December 1733—about three weeks after their expulsion from the Established Church,—the four brethren, according to previous appointment, met at Gairney Bridge, a small village about three miles southward of Kinross, to confer about the measures most suitable for them in their unprecedented circumstances. Messrs. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline and Thomas Mair of Orwell were also present on this interesting occasion, but took no part in the deliberations. The first day of their meeting, was entirely occupied in prayer, humiliation and devout converse. On the following day the same exercises were resumed, after which they proceeded to the serious consideration of the question, ‘Whether it was expedient for them in their present situation to assume a judicative capacity?’ ‘After much and serious reasoning,’ says Mr. Wilson of Perth, ‘the four brethren did all, with one voice, give it as their judgment that they should presently constitute into a Presbytery; and the Rev. Ebenezer

Erskine was, by their unanimous consent, desired to be their mouth to the Lord in this solemn action; and he was enabled, with much enlargement of soul, to consecrate and dedicate them to the Lord and to the service of his church, particularly of his broken and oppressed heritage in the present situation into which, by the holy and wise providence of God, they were brought; and after prayer he was chosen Moderator of their Presbytery. I hope,' adds the venerable writer, 'they felt and experienced something of the Lord's gracious countenance and special presence.'\* Who can doubt that they did? How much of what has happened since may have been an answer to those prayers! That humble meeting beneath the thatched roof at Gairney Bridge, is surrounded with a new interest, when we look at it in connection with the results of a century of years. It is like taking our place at the fountain-head of a river that has flowed far, and fertilized many provinces; or like standing by the cradle of a Father of nations.

Various weighty reasons were assigned by the four brethren, for thus forming themselves into a Presbytery. Their number was sufficient for enabling them to act formally under this designation, and they were thereby only assuming the powers for which they had protested in their deed of Secession. Moreover, besides declaring in this manner their attachment to what they esteemed the scriptural model of church government, they hoped that by this means they would more effectually secure against the risings of disorder in their infant community; while they would have a new and more special claim to the promise of the divine presence among them. It was reasonable to expect too that, as a Presbytery, they would be in a better position for dispensing the ordinances of religion to the multitudes throughout the land who felt themselves aggrieved by the ministration of intruders, and unedified

\* Defence of the Reformation Principles, &c., p. 480. 'There was, I thought, much of the Lord with them; and I found my heart frequently warmed and drawn out in prayer with them.' Ralph Erskine in his Diary. Frazer's Life of R. Erskine, p. 207.

by the preachers of 'another gospel;' while their influence in stemming the current of defection, was certain to be greater when they had the advantage of frequent consultation, common measures, and compacted effort.\*

But while thus boldly assuming at once a presbyterial form, it marks the grave wisdom of the Seceding Fathers that they resolved to abstain, in the meantime, from all judicial acts, and to confine themselves at their meetings to conference, mutual exhortation, and prayer. To have proceeded farther at the first would have indicated a desire to remain separate, while the attitude in which they wished to stand to their brethren from whom they had been constrained to withdraw themselves, was that of men willing to return to their fellowship so soon as they returned to their duty, and thus made the way back to their communion honourable and safe. It was true the hopes of such a retracing of their steps on the part of the rulers in the Assembly were faint; but the four brethren would not presumptuously anticipate providence.

It was no contradiction to this wise resolution that the four brethren appointed two of their number to prepare a statement of their reasons for separating from the communion of the leading party in the church judicatories. Such a statement had been promised in the Protest which they laid upon the table of the Commission at the moment of Secession, in which they spoke of 'many weighty reasons to be laid open in due time,' and was demanded by a regard for the great interests to whose defence they were committed, as well as for their own character, which had already become the subject of misrepresentation and assault. A document with this design was accordingly prepared by Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff, under the title of 'A Testimony to the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland, or reasons by (the four brethren) for their protestation entered before the Commission of the General Assembly,' and after having

\* Gib's Display, p. 36.



been considered and approved by the brethren, at a meeting held by them in March, was commanded to be published and brought into general circulation in such time as to anticipate the next meeting of the General Assembly.

This paper, which came to be known in after times by the name of the First or Extra-judicial Testimony, is a production of much ability, and as it contains the four brethren's own deliberate and authoritative exposition of their case, it may reasonably be considered as affording the best means of ascertaining the true nature of the Secession, and judging of the validity of its grounds. As documents of this kind, however, do not usually fall into the hands of the general reader, and as from their official and abstract form, they are apt to be turned from with a repulsive air, it will be proper that we here interweave with our narrative a brief compend of the reasonings and explanations contained in it, that the student of this interesting period of Scottish ecclesiastical history may, as much as is possible, have the case before him at one view, and hear how the Seceding fathers themselves sustained their protest, and vindicated their formation of themselves into a distinct religious fellowship.

Such a compend, besides its other obvious uses, will serve to dispel the misapprehensions of that numerous class of persons who confound the unjust and arbitrary treatment of the Fathers of the Secession, with the reasons of the Secession. The causes of the Secession were various and had long been accumulating; the expulsion of Mr. Erskine and his friends only announced that the occasion had come when it should take place. It fixed the date of the movement, rather than supplied its grounds. Men were not invited to join themselves to their standard from sympathy with them as sufferers, but because, as they affirmed, the ecclesiastical and religious condition of the Church of Scotland had become such that all who would preserve their rights and perform their duty to conscience and truth, were bound to make common cause with them as witness-bearers. This distinction has been too generally overlooked,

but it is necessary to be seen, in order to our understanding the nature of the Secession, or duly appreciating its grounds.

1. The first ground of Secession adduced by the brethren, referred to *the long series of inroads that had been made upon the constitutional rights and liberties of the church*. They accused the prevailing party of 'breaking down our beautiful Presbyterian constitution,' and they adduced a multitude of facts, with which their more recent ecclesiastical history had been thickly strewn, to substantiate the charge. It had been provided by repeated acts of the church, passed in her best times, as an invaluable barrier against tyrannical inflictions or rash innovations, that no acts of Assembly could become binding and permanent rules of the church, until they had been remitted for the consideration of the various presbyteries, and the general voice of those presbyteries given in their favour. But this goodly fence had been broken down in several instances,—especially in the Act of Assembly, 1732, respecting the settlement of vacant parishes, which was passed in opposition to the expressed opinion of the great majority of the inferior courts, and in the Act prohibiting the recording of reasons of dissent, which was passed without consulting the inferior courts at all.

While the manner in which these Acts had been imposed violated the spirit of their whole Presbyterian constitution, the Acts themselves shook to its foundations their ecclesiastical framework, and subverted some of their dearest rights. Inmemorial usage, as well as many express acts, had secured to ministers and elders the right of recording reasons of dissent,—a right of highest moment, both as affording an opportunity to faithful men for publishing to posterity their opposition to corrupt measures, and of exempting themselves from the charge of being participators in the guilt of the authors of those measures. And this right had been wrested from their hands at the moment when its exercise was most emphatically needed. While the Act regarding the settlement of vacant congregations, which lodged in the hands of a few an important privilege

which Christ had conferred upon all, and made external rank the ground of invidious distinctions in the house of God, where all were to be on a level, was an attempt to frame laws where Christ had only given them authority to administer his laws, nay, to frame laws in opposition to his laws, and a daring to lord it over God's heritage. The same lordly and prelatic spirit was manifested in their promoting the intrusion of presentees upon reclaiming congregations, in their threatening the highest ecclesiastical censures upon those who lifted their voice against such unconstitutional proceedings and refused to become parties to their perpetration, and in the extraordinary and undefined power assumed by the Commissions of the church, and the committees of that Commission, which, travelling from place to place, took the work of presbyteries out of their hands, and at once, in disregard of the wishes of the people, and defiance of the remonstrances of presbyteries, conducted the most important affairs of the church in a manner the most arbitrary and absolute. 'What is the difference,' say these four faithful witnesses, 'betwixt fourteen diocesan prelates taking the power of trial and ordination out of the hands of all the presbyteries in Scotland, and a commission of the General Assembly, whereof thirty-nine makes a quorum, divesting all the presbyteries of Scotland of this inherent right and privilege, when their sinful and unwarrantable orders are not obeyed? For our part, we know none; except that the former exercise their lordly dominion over the heritage of God in a plain consistency with their declared principles, when the latter do it under a Presbyterian mask, but in a direct inconsistency with their professed and known principles.' Yes, they looked for Presbyterianism, and they now beheld despotism; the name alone remained, and the Secession was to restore and enshrine this invaluable bulwark at once of ecclesiastical order and of popular right.

Let us now hear the second charge. It is put with equal force and truth.

2. *The ruling party were pursuing such measures as did*

*either actually corrupt, or had the most direct tendency to corrupt, the true doctrine contained in their excellent Confession of Faith.* Their reluctant entrance on the case of Professor Simson, the lenient sentence inflicted on him, after it had been proved that he had been throwing dishonour on that 'name at which every knee should bow,' and when the majority of presbyteries were calling for his excommunication; the open 'countenancing and caressing' of Professor Campbell by assemblies and commissions, at the very time when he was known to be spreading the most erroneous tenets; their continued and systematic refusal to publish any act confirmatory of the truths that had been assailed, or condemnatory of the dangerous errors that had been propagated, though such a measure had been repeatedly recommended and urged by synods and presbyteries, and even solicited by the friends of truth in England and Ireland, who were alarmed by the spread of Arianism in those countries; all these facts were justly held by the Seceding fathers as substantiating this weighty accusation.

And of late years, the canker which was local before, had spread itself throughout the church, and among her ministers there appeared a general falling away from the simplicity of the truth. One class seemed to occupy themselves with exhibiting the credentials rather than expounding the contents of the gospel; or while presenting their hearers with 'dry and sapless disquisitions on moral virtues,' as habitually abstained from alluding to those evangelical discoveries which are divinely intended and alone fitted to awaken the spirit of obedience, as if no divine revelation had ever been given to the world, and their text-book had been Seneca and not the Scriptures. While another class, instead of proclaiming the divine method of justification through the faith of Christ, the grand theme of the Christian ministry, represented the gospel as a new law, in which faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, were announced as the ground of a sinner's acceptance before God, and Christ spoken of indeed as the model of virtue, but seldom named and never held forth as the Saviour of men.

The one class of shepherds left their sheep to perish in the wilderness, the other led them to the pitfall ;—both kept them away from the fountain of life.

‘ Upon which account,’ say these faithful witnesses, with sad and homely truthfulness, ‘ we judge this generation and our poor posterity in the utmost danger of losing the gospel. through the prevalency of a corrupt and unsound ministry. If a man have any little acquaintance with what they call the belles-lettres, or gentlemanly learning,—if he have the art of making his compliments and address to a person of quality,—if he can accept of a presentation from a patron and be a fit tool to carry on the measures of the ruling party in the church,—that is the man that shall find encouragement in our assemblies and commissions, though he know not how to speak a word in season to a weary soul. No regard is had to a man’s acquaintance with experimental religion and the power of godliness upon his own soul, according to the acts of the church in former times. But on the contrary, if there be a man who has an air of piety and religion, however well polished by the Lord for edifying the body of Christ and for overthrowing the works of the devil, for which purpose the Son of God was manifested, the prevailing party have an evil eye of jealousy upon that man, as a person of dangerous and divisive principles. And if a clear gospel call to such a man offer from the body of a Christian people, he must be set aside, and a hue and cry raised against him, as though an enemy were coming into our borders. By these and the like methods of management, it looks as if a faithful ministry in a few years shall be gradually wormed out of Scotland, and our posterity left without the knowledge of the gospel, and our covenanted work of reformation buried in perpetual oblivion.’

This was indeed a sombre picture, and yet its darkest hues might be verified from the testimony of contemporary writers. ‘ This generation,’ say they, ‘ and our posterity are in the utmost danger of losing the gospel’—what if these faithful men were now raised up as God’s instruments for preserving it. Assuredly no commission could be more



momentous or honourable. But the indictment is not yet closed,—

3. *The prevailing party were also chargeable with imposing new and sinful terms of ministerial communion*, inasmuch as ministers were now restrained from testifying against the present course of defection and backsliding, on pain of ecclesiastical censures. This complaint was principally supported by reference to the case of Mr. Erskine, when he had been declared worthy of rebuke, first by an inferior judicatory, and afterwards by the Assembly, for testifying against a measure which he believed to be injurious, unconstitutional, and unscriptural. The general prohibition was not indeed conveyed in express terms, but it followed unavoidably from that sentence, for if Mr. Erskine was restrained from testifying against the obnoxious act, so of course was every other minister; and if their lips were to be sealed against one measure, why not against all? and, indeed, from the nature of the case, the restraint was likely to be the most arbitrary where the measure was the least capable of defence. They might thus see their whole Presbyterian constitution subverted, the people's rights trampled under foot, and the gospel itself laid in the dust, and be restrained from uttering any voice of remonstrance or alarm. Terms of communion like these, which were unknown when they were ordained to the ministry, could on no account be submitted to. They were contrary to their vows of ordination, in which they had solemnly engaged that they would 'to the uttermost of their power, in their station, assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, and our Presbyterian Church government and discipline.' They were contrary to the law of Christ, which bade them not shun to declare the whole counsel of God; and, therefore, say these honest and resolute men, 'if the superior power and authority of Jesus Christ commanding us, be contrary to your authority, it must in such an event cast the balance with us.' Surely this was no slight or shadowy grievance to conscientious men. But all had not even yet been told.



4. *The ruling party had persisted in their corrupt courses, notwithstanding all attempts to reclaim them.* They had to charge them, not with an occasional divergence merely, but with a systematic and long continued defection. And this had gone on, until all the ordinary means of checking arbitrary proceedings, and obtaining a redress of grievances, had been exhausted. Presbyteries had petitioned and synods had remonstrated; representations had been sent up from almost every quarter of the church, and in almost unlimited number, and in general had either on some frivolous grounds been refused to be read, or referred to a select committee, as a decent way of consigning them to oblivion. A similar treatment awaited the commissioners from inferior courts, when, in the name of their constituents, they occasionally appeared at the bar of the Assembly, claiming a redress of grievances. Their claim was either at once rejected by the ready vote of predetermined majorities, or refused to be considered on the excuse of want of time; though, as they are seasonably reminded by the Seceding Fathers, ‘while they had no time to consider the weighty grievances that the flock of Christ were groaning under, the last Assembly found time to intrude ministers into the parishes of Stow and Kingaldrum, and to pass severe and unjust sentences against themselves.’

5. *This was the crowning charge of all.* As if to leave to faithful men no alternative, and to make the course of duty plain and indubitable, not satisfied with disregarding their representations and petitions against corrupt and tyrannical courses, *these had been made the ground of censure*; on their protesting against such censure as imposing fetters on their ministerial fidelity and liberty, they had been suspended from their sacred office, and on their refusing to yield obedience to a sentence of suspension arbitrarily inflicted on them because of their resolute and unflinching witness-bearing, they had been cast out of the communion of the church. What remained for them then but to maintain, in a state of separation from the church, what they were no longer permitted to do in a state of

communion with her. They must either abandon their duty, and drop the testimony which they had so nobly borne, and which involved such precious interests, or they must secede. There seemed but one course open for honest men; they had already entered it, and they were resolved to follow it. 'Therefore,' say they, looking back upon these "many and weighty reasons," 'it is not only warrantable for us, but we are laid under a necessity to lift up a testimony in a way of secession from them against the present current of defection, whereby our constitution is subverted, our doctrine is corrupted, and the heritage and flock of Christ are wounded, scattered, and broken, that we may not partake with them in their sins, and may do what in us lies to transmit unto succeeding generations those valuable truths that have been handed down to us by the contendings and wrestlings of a great cloud of witnesses in Scotland, since the dawning of reformation light amongst us.'

A calm review of these reasons, authoritatively set forth by the Seceding Fathers themselves, will serve more than one useful purpose even at the present hour. It will show the broad foundation on which their Secession was based, not any one grievance, but 'a complex course of defection both in doctrine, government, and discipline, carried on with an high hand.' It will expose the utter injustice and ingratitude of those epithets of 'popular demagogues' and 'intemperate and obstinate disturbers,' with which even some men of eminence\* have associated the honoured names of the Secession Fathers, and stooped to do the foul work of faction. An irresponsible and complicated despotism had supplanted their popular Presbyterian constitution,—the leprosy of error had spread itself throughout the majority of her ministry,—every constitutional form of remonstrance had been disregarded, and at length, not only disregarded, but forbidden,—if these were frivolous grounds

\* For example, Sir H. Moncrieff in his *Life of Dr. Erskine*. Appendix, No. I.

of separation, what would be deemed serious and sufficient ? 'They had not gone out with haste, neither had they gone out by flight.' And as for schism, it can only be applied to the Secession in utter oblivion of all its peculiar features. The violent measures of the church judicatories, in thrusting them out from their communion, relieved them from settling the delicate question ;—'Whether the evils that prevailed in the Scottish Church were such in themselves as to warrant a separation from her fellowship,' and reduced them to the choice between sinful silence and separation ;—could it be schism to prefer the latter alternative ? The mandate of their ecclesiastical rulers requiring them to sin, was the voice of their Lord commanding them to secede.

We have already stated that this document was issued and in general circulation prior to the meeting of the General Assembly in May. Its bold tone of remonstrance and exposure, supported by statements which every one knew to be truths, spread alarm throughout the ruling party in the supreme judicatory ; and the numerous defenders of corruption and abettors of tyranny, quailed before the charges of four honest men. Nor were there wanting other unequivocal indications that they had carried their oppressive measures too far for the temper of the times, and that a very general sympathy, and even admiration, was arising among the people in behalf of the Seceding Fathers. In those days when information on general subjects was less widely disseminated, the minds of the people were intensely turned to questions and measures of an ecclesiastical nature, and the proceedings of the ecclesiastical rulers freely canvassed and often well understood ; in consequence of which the brethren came to be looked upon by multitudes, and those usually the most serious and thinking part of the community, as the friends of truth and the representatives of popular rights, and to be regarded with the admiration and enthusiasm due to sufferers in their cause. It was not to be wondered at, that, in the parishes of the seceding ministers, these feel-

ings should in some cases assume a somewhat irregular and tumultuous form. When Mr. Adam Ferguson, minister at Killin, went to intimate the sentence against Mr. Wilson from the pulpit of the old church of Perth, he was prevented, as he complained in a letter to the Commission, by a 'tumultuous multitude' which met him at a distance from the city and forcibly resisted his entrance. A similar reception awaited Professor Campbell of St. Andrews on his proposing to intimate the sentence against Mr. Moncrieff from the pulpit of the church at Abernethy; and on his being refused protection from the Sheriff-substitute of Perth, for which he had previously taken the precaution to apply, he lodged a protest against the refusal of the Sheriff and wisely desisted from the attempt.\* But far beyond their own immediate parishes, the interest was circulating and deepening. Prompted by zeal for religion and liberty, and no doubt in some cases borne away by sympathy, multitudes were to be found leaving their native parishes, especially where the minister had been introduced by a forced settlement, and travelling sometimes great distances to attend on the ministrations of the seceding ministers. When the Lord's Supper was dispensed at Abernethy in the spring of 1734, the concourse of people from all parts of Scotland was so unprecedentedly great as to awaken universal astonishment.

These occurrences were not unmarked by the ecclesiastical rulers, or the voice in which they spoke to them misunderstood. They saw plainly that they had carried their severities to an impolitic excess, and that when they had hoped to extinguish opposition, they had awakened a spirit of resistance which any additional severities would rapidly extend. Nor were they blind to the fact that there was still a party in the Assembly who sympathized with the four brethren, and whom a continuance in their present course, and still more additional severities, might so exas-

\* Index to Unprinted Acts of Assembly, 1734. Struthers' History of Scotland, vi. 3.

perate as to render the rupture yet wider, by tempting them to cast in their lot with the Seceders. To retain these brethren in their ranks, therefore, to quell the popular excitement, and if not to restore the four brethren, at least to disarm them of their present influence, they determined, for the time, to assume a policy of conciliation and concession. They would yield up the administration in part into the hands of the orthodox and reforming party, securing at the same time that nothing should be conceded which could not afterwards be recovered, and would wait for a more convenient season when they could safely return to those measures for spreading latitudinarianism and formality in their pulpits, and extinguishing the popular element in their ecclesiastical constitution, which they had so long prosecuted with so high a hand.

Accordingly, when the Assembly met in May 1734, it appeared to have fallen under the influence of a new and more genial spirit. To a sanguine and superficial onlooker, it might almost have seemed as if the 'free, faithful, and reforming Assembly' to which the four brethren had appealed, had already come. The barrier acts were confirmed. The Act prohibiting the recording of reasons of dissent and that concerning the planting of vacant churches which had been the matter of representation by the brethren before their secession, and of complaint in their testimony now, were declared to be 'no longer binding rules of this church.' On a complaint by the parish of Auchtermuchty and the presbytery of Cupar against the Commission, for proceeding in the settlement of a minister at Auchtermuchty who was obnoxious to both, the Commission was declared to have exceeded its powers, and, contrary to the usual practice, the settlement annulled. A Committee was appointed to prepare an overture for checking the unscriptural style of preaching that had become so prevalent in the church, and for directing ministers to the more edifying and efficient discharge of their duty. An act was passed declaring that due ministerial freedom was not impaired or restrained by any thing con-



nected with the process against Mr. Erskine and his brethren. And on the last day of their sittings, another act was passed empowering the Synod of Perth and Stirling to remove the censures from the four brethren and to restore them to their respective charges. And the Synod of Perth and Stirling did accordingly assemble at the latter place, July the second, 1734, and 'by virtue of the foresaid delegated power and authority, with one voice and consent, take off the sentences pronounced by the Commission of the General Assembly, 1733, against the foresaid four brethren, declaring the same of no force or effect for the future, unite and restore them to ministerial communion with this church, to their several charges, and to the exercise of all parts of the ministerial function therein, as fully and freely as there never had been act, sentence, obstacle, or impediment whatsoever in the way thereof in time past.' \*

Was not the way now opened for an honourable return to the bosom of the Church from which they had been so painfully separated? Many imagined that it was, and expected that they should instantly hear the brethren expressing their high satisfaction with these symptoms of reformation, and acknowledging that all the ends which they had sought by their secession had already been gained. The reforming party in the Assembly, headed by the venerable Willison of Dundee, mistaking the mere temporary connivance of the ruling party for evidence of a reforming spirit, were particularly sanguine of this result. Even the amiable Mr. Wilson of Perth, as unsuspecting of duplicity in others as he was incapable of it in himself, misled by the specious aspect of some of these concessions, in a letter to Mr. Erskine soon after the meeting of Assembly, expressed a hope that it might yet be practicable for them to return into the bosom of the Church.† And with such confidence did the Synod which had restored the brethren

\* Extract of the proceedings of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, &c.—*Siruthers' History of Scotland*, vi. 12.

† *Ferrier's Memoirs of W. Wilson*, p. 278.



calculate on their ready acquiescence, that, in Mr. Erskine's absence, they elected him to the Moderator's chair. Certainly every consideration of mere private and present interest pleaded strongly for their return, early friendship, worldly emolument, personal ease, love to the church of their fathers,—but one question remained, what was duty? and on this the Seceding Fathers took time to deliberate.

Repeated meetings were accordingly held by them for the purpose of calmly considering what was their duty in the new position in which the recent proceedings and decisions of the church judicatories had placed them, and the unanimous conclusion in which their deliberations terminated, was that the way had not yet been opened for an honourable and 'untainted return.' Most readily did they acknowledge the honest zeal of some of their brethren in the last Assembly to bring about a substantial reformation, nor were they reluctant to admit that some good measures had been passed, and thus part of their causes of complaint removed, but they were unable to shut their eyes to the fact that while individual cases had been grappled with, no adequate measures had been taken for removing the prolific sources in which they originated, and that the whole seemed rather the grudging and qualified concession of policy and fear, than the first movements of a spirit of sincere and progressive reformation.

For example, they had repealed the act prohibiting the recording of reasons of dissent, and the act respecting the settlement of vacant congregations simply on account of the informality with which they had been imposed, but without any acknowledgment of their sinfulness. In one instance they had shown a disposition to respect the popular rights and to prevent a violent intrusion, but no unequivocal statement of principle had been put forth declaring the acceptance of presentations contrary to the wishes of the people to be censurable, and thus placing a permanent guard against the recurrence of the evil. Certain measures had been taken to prevent the increase of doctrinal error, and the continued connivance at this on

the part of the church courts had been one principal ground of Secession, but those measures must remain a dead letter so long as the propagators of error both from the pulpit and from the chair, remained unchallenged and uncensured. The Act concerning ministerial freedom, instead of dispelling, rather confirmed all that had been dreaded from their procedure against Mr. Erskine, inasmuch as it declared that 'due freedom was not impaired or restrained by the late Assembly's decision in a particular process,' from which the conclusion seemed to follow, that Mr. Erskine, in the sermon that gave rise to the process against him and his brethren, in protesting against the decision of the Assembly, had transgressed the boundaries of due ministerial freedom, and consequently had received the treatment which their misconduct and irregularity deserved. And as for the deed of Assembly appointing their restoration to the communion of the church and to their ministerial status, they were constrained to express their entire disappointment and dissatisfaction with it. For they could not but observe that the greatest care was taken to avoid any admission that the sentences expelling them from the church had been illegal or unjust. The Synod was instructed to remove those sentences, not because they were admitted to be wrong, but because they were discovered to be inexpedient, 'considering the lamentable consequences that have followed and may yet follow upon the separation of these brethren.'\* But suppose the probability of such 'lamentable consequences' to be diminished, might not the same course of conduct be resumed, and the very deed which they had now repealed be referred to as a precedent. The church judicatories, from the dread of lamentable consequences alone, had sent 'to thrust them out privily,' and it was a fit occasion for replying, 'Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.' The Seceding Fathers concluded that they could not return to the communion of the church, either with honour to

\* Unprinted Acts of Assembly, 1734.

themselves or with safety to the great interests which they had undertaken to defend. If they went back, it must be as favoured criminals, not as justified men, and without any tangible evidence that the great ends for which they had seceded had been secured,—the healing of her corrupt clergy, and the placing on a firm basis the rights of her people. Till this was done, they must continue to rear their Secession-banner.

‘I humbly conceive,’ says Ebenezer Erskine, in a faithful and spirited letter to the Moderator of the Presbytery of Stirling, ‘there is a great difference betwixt a positive reformation and a stop or sist given to a deformation. I am far from derogating from the stand made by the worthy members of the last Assembly against the career of the corrupt party. But allow me to say, that to me any thing done appears rather a check or restraint upon those men for a time, than any real cleanly reformation.

‘Some brethren call us to come in and help them against the current of defection. But now that the hand of Providence has taken us out of the current against which we were swimming, and set us upon the Reformation-ground by a solemn testimony and constitution, it would be vain for us to endanger ourselves by running into the current again, unless our reverend brethren who call for our help, can persuade us that our so doing will turn the current and save both them and ourselves.’

Again,—‘There is a difference to be made betwixt the Established Church of Scotland and the Church of Christ in Scotland; for I reckon that the last is in a great measure driven into the wilderness by the first. And since God in his adorable providence has led us into the wilderness with her, I judge it our duty to tarry with her for a while there, and to prefer her afflictions to all the advantages of a legal establishment.’\*—The determination was worthy at once of the penetration and the principle of the Seceding Fathers.

\* Frazer's Life of E. Erskine, pp. 397—403.

They were not long in giving to the world the grounds of this determination, in a document entitled 'Reasons by (the four Seceding ministers) why they have not acceded to the judicatories of the Established Church,' and the proceedings of following assemblies were sufficient to confirm their worst fears, and to show how justly they had estimated the real temper and tendencies of those who now guided the councils of the church. When the Assembly of 1735 soon afterwards convened, it seemed to be swayed alternately by opposite principles, a wish to conciliate on the one hand, and an impatient desire to follow out its hidden purposes on the other. In some instances the severity of former deeds was partially relaxed, in others new measures of almost equal severity were unscrupulously passed. In the case of various congregations that had deserted the ministry of intruders, and to whom the incumbents of surrounding parishes had been forbidden to administer sealing ordinances, the prohibition was withdrawn, and the presbyteries in which they were situated permitted to treat them with a measure of indulgence. But as if to dash the hopes which these indications might have awakened, when the petition of Mr. Archibald Rennie, who had been obtruded on the parish of Muckhart, and towards whom the parishioners, with scarcely an exception, had manifested the strongest dislike, praying that he might be enrolled a member of the Presbytery of Auchterarder, and that of Mr. James Pursell, who had been similarly obtruded on the parish of Troqueer, who prayed for a similar benefit, were laid before the Assembly, the cases were remitted to the respective synods in which those parishes were situated, with injunctions to 'continue their endeavours to obtain harmony in those quarters,' injunctions which had only one meaning in those times, as requiring the Synod to enrol the intruder and to bring the people to submit to his ministry. In the same spirit of arbitrary dictation and contempt of the popular voice, a call was appointed to be moderated in the parish of Carriden, 'expressly and exclusively in behalf of the presentee.' How easy was it to see

in all this the ruling party gradually and cautiously resuming the reins of administration, which they had seemed for a moment to renounce, but from which their hearts had never been estranged. Still the four brethren waited in the faint hope that a sufficient number might yet be found among her rulers to breathe a purer spirit into her councils, and, in the face of numerous solicitations from people in various quarters of the land, to dispense among them the ordinances of religion, resolved to abstain, for another year at least, from judicative acts, and to confine themselves in their meetings of presbytery to conference and prayer. This was not like the course of 'popular demagogues' or 'ambitious schismatics,' to see the tide of popular interest floating up to their feet, and yet refuse to enter, until God called.

The Assembly of 1736 proved itself still more arbitrary and corrupt than its predecessor. The mask of conciliation which it had been found convenient to assume in 1734, was not, indeed, as yet thrown aside, but it had become so transparent that every one might detect the genuine features that lurked beneath. Loud professions were so contradicted by its practice, the instructions it emitted by its own application of them, that the record of its unfaithfulness reads like farce, and the rulers seem to have added to the sin of trampling on the popular rights the offence of sporting with the popular credulity. For example, they passed an act, declaring 'that it was, and had been, since the Reformation, a principle of this church, that no minister should be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation, and seriously recommending to all judicatories of this church to have due regard to the said principle in planting vacant congregations;'<sup>\*</sup> and yet, when the parishioners of Denny appeared at their bar, with a complaint against the sentence of the Commission appointing the settlement of Mr. James Stirling as minister of that parish, they did not hesitate, in the face of a unanimous

<sup>\*</sup> Printed Acts of Assembly, 1736.



remonstrance from the congregation, to dismiss the complaint, and instructed the Presbytery to use adequate measures to bring them to submit to the decisions of the church and to the ministry of the intruder. In like manner, while they turned the overture of a former Assembly into a standing Act, enjoining upon the minister of the church a more evangelical strain of preaching, and requiring professors of divinity to explain and recommend this manner of preaching to their pupils, they dismissed uncensured from their bar an individual who was known by his public writings to have substituted a shallow system of heathenish ethics in the room of Christian truth, to have scoffed at experimental religion, and laboured to undermine some of the most peculiar and precious doctrines of the gospel of Christ. These shameless inconsistencies proved to serious and discriminating onlookers the utter hollowness and insincerity of the reforms of 1734, that they were blossoms which were never intended by the ruling party to ripen into fruit; they told the reforming party that what they had mistaken for power was only the effect of connivance, and that when they had begun to imagine themselves leaders they were only dupes, while it proclaimed to the Seceding Fathers that the period for waiting was past, and that that of resolute and vigorous action had come, and that it was 'not only their duty, but high time for them to proceed to the exercise of government and discipline.' Even Mr. Wilson of Perth, who had been the most reluctant to abandon the hope of a favourable change in the councils and measures of the church opening the way for an honourable return to her communion, ceased from this time to indulge the fond imagination, and acknowledged that 'when he had observed the conduct of the judicatories since the year 1734, he had been gradually cleared, and more and more confirmed that it was their duty to continue in a state of Secession.'\*

Accordingly, soon after the Assembly of 1736, the four

\* Defence of Reformation Principles, &c., p. 357.



brethren met, and believing that their course had now been made plain to them by Providence, resolved to act in a judicative capacity, and to carry out in a state of Secession from the judicatories of the church, those great objects which events had proved it impossible for them to accomplish in a state of communion with them. In many corners of the land, the people were fainting and ready to perish under the ministrations of heretical and unfaithful teachers, they resolved to bless those regions with a pure and unfettered gospel. Thousands were groaning under the yoke of patronage, and such as had withdrawn from the ministry of incompetent men and intruded hirelings had in many instances been subjected to excommunication; the Secession would gather together these torn and scattered sheep, and afford to aggrieved consciences an asylum where the privileges of the church might be enjoyed without the sacrifice of freedom or the violation of conscience. The ruling party in the church, instead of carrying on the work of reformation to which she was pledged by her very constitution and history, and raising her testimony in vindication of dishonoured truth, and against prevalent and deadly errors, had, in various instances, placed its brand upon truth and screened erroneous men; the Seceding Fathers would stand forth as witnesses in the midst of the land, and lifting up the fallen testimony, 'display a banner because of the truth,' and carry forward the work of reformation. These seemed to them to be the chief objects embodied in their commission, and to accomplish this commission they now assumed the form and functions of a distinct and regularly organized religious community. The words of a holy and far-seeing patriarch of the Church of Scotland, who had often mourned over the incipient tokens of defection which he beheld in his day, seemed now about to be fulfilled, 'I apprehend,' said he, 'that matters will not be right till the Lord shall bring a Church out of the bowels of this Church.'

Nor were the Seceding Fathers slow, when once the

course of duty had been plain to them, in seeking to fulfil the various parts of their commission. Overstepping the boundaries of their own parishes, to which they had hitherto almost entirely confined themselves from a fastidious regard to presbyterial order, they visited many of the suffering districts, and everywhere found a people ready to receive them. Little societies were formed in many of these, which continued to meet for prayer and conference, and in this way not a few of those congregations were formed, which, after the lapse of more than a hundred years, still rank among the most stable and vigorous in the Secession. Eager applications poured in upon the presbytery from all quarters for a regular and permanent connexion with the new body, and the regular administration of Christian ordinances; and even from Ireland, whither the seeds of the Secession had already been borne by the hands of a pious sailor, there came a petition from nearly three hundred families. This induced the presbytery to take young men on trials for license; and that the cause might be duly sustained and extended, they appointed Mr. Wilson of Perth Professor of Theology, to train young men who should be sent up from those praying societies, or otherwise properly recommended, for the work of the ministry. The Secession never fell into the wild dream from which even the least enlightened of the churches are now rapidly recovering, of building up the church by the hands of rude and uneducated men.\*

On the 3d of December of the same year, the four brethren emitted a most elaborate document, under the name of 'An act, declaration, and testimony for the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Church of Scotland, and commonly known as the Judicial Testimony.' In the First or Extra-judicial Testimony, the defections of the Church of Scotland were only specified in so far as these were made the grounds of Secession, in this the

\* It is a remarkable fact that each of the Four Brethren in succession eventually filled the Theological Chair.

whole of the ecclesiastical history of Scotland from the Reformation downwards is rapidly traced, the various occasions of improvement noticed and judicially approved, and the numerous instances of defection and relapse marked and judicially condemned. These are represented as just causes of 'the Lord's controversy' with his church, and fit occasions of humiliation and sorrow. The errors which had recently appeared in the church, and which were still unremoved and unrepented of, are there pointed out, and the opposite truth, as declared in the Confession of Faith, distinctly declared, and, in short, an explicit and satisfactory enunciation and exposition given of almost every essential doctrine in the scheme of revealed truth. This, the Seceding Fathers insisted, the circumstances of the times required that the judicatories of the church should have done, and seeing those judicatories had neglected their duty, they felt themselves called upon to raise the fallen standard, and aiming still at progressive reformation, 'serve themselves heirs' to the faithful witnesses and confessors of earlier times.

It must be confessed that it is impossible to speak of this important document with unqualified approval. The occasional historical inaccuracies which occasioned the jubilant notes of Mr. Currie of Kinglassie and other embittered partisans,\* will indeed awaken the surprise of no one who thinks of the long and often uncertain field over which the historical review extends. But the glowing and almost romantic terms in which the Testimony speaks of the covenanting periods, are such as a calm estimate of some of the principles and practices of those periods must considerably reduce and qualify. The sentiments expressed on the repeal of the penal statutes against witchcraft and on certain questions that touch on the rights of conscience, are such as prove that on the former of these points they were still trammelled by the illiberal notions of the age, and that on the latter they were only feeling their way to

\* Currie's Essay on Separation, *passim*.

the solid ground which their descendants have happily reached. While their unfriendly references to the Union with England show us, that on this subject they had not yet risen above the prejudices of the church which they had left, whose Assembly, it is well known, for a long course of years annually specified the Union as a ground of national fasting. But with these qualifying statements, the Judicial Testimony claims to be spoken of as a most precious document published to the church, at a most seasonable juncture. In its clear and scriptural declarations on those intimately related subjects, the Headship of Christ, the independence of the church and the right of the people to choose their own pastors, as well as in the fresh statement and elucidation of fundamental truths flung abroad upon the public mind when general attention was turned to their movements, it must have accomplished great good, arresting the advance of error, establishing unsettled minds in the truth, and proving an extensive educator of the general mind.

The infant cause proceeded with vigour, the congregations of Abernethy and Kinclaven formally connected themselves with the presbytery, to which their respective sessions sent up a representative elder, and new congregations began to be organized in various districts. Every thing indicated consolidation and progress. And while the conduct of the Assemblies of 1735 and 1736 had confirmed the four brethren in their resolution to continue their secession, it had gradually been loosening the attachment of other good men to the Establishment, by dispelling every lingering hope of internal reform. The consequence was that, at the first meeting of the Associate Presbytery in 1737, their hands were strengthened by the accession of the Rev. Thomas Mair of Orwell, and the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, to their little band. It will be remembered that both of these ministers had taken part in the protest against the deed of Assembly that had driven the four brethren out of the church; in the interval they had joined in laying upon the table of the Assembly a detail of

grievances, which they earnestly besought them to redress, and the history of the two past years shows how little their honest efforts had availed to stem the swelling current.\* Nevertheless, the diary of Ralph Erskine proves that it was only by slow degrees that his course was opened up to him, and that when he at length consented to sever his connexion with the Scottish Church, it was done, not in the spirit of anger and chagrin, but in the sorrowful spirit of one who mourned the corruption that drove him from her fellowship.† The language of this good man on signifying to the Associate Presbytery his adherence to the Secession, displays a beautiful combination of discriminating conscientiousness with enlarged charity. ‘By joining with the said brethren,’ says he, ‘I intend no withdrawing from ministerial communion with any of the godly ministers of this church who are wrestling against the defections of the times, although they have not the same light with us in every particular. Nor do I hereby intend to preclude myself from returning and joining with the judicatories of this church, upon their returning to their duty. I am sensible what a bad tendency division naturally has, and desire to shun all divisive principles and practices contrary to the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland, agreeable to and founded upon the word of God; and I judge it my duty to endeavour through grace to follow after that peace which has truth for the ground and ornament of it. Yet the safest way for preserving peace being to cleave to Jesus Christ, who is the centre of all true and holy union, and to advance the truth as it is in him, I therefore think myself obliged, leaving events to the Lord, to take the present opportunity of joining in what I reckon a faithful testimony for it, such as I have no access

\* Scots Magazine for 1752, p. 510. Frazer’s Memoirs of R. Erskine, p. 210.

† ‘I set aside a part of this day for prayer. I was thoughtful about that great business of Secession, and sought the Lord would give me light.’ Diary, Jan. 8, 1737. Frazer’s Memoirs of R. Erskine, pp. 212, 213.



to promote, in connexion with the judicatories of the national church.\* There is not one word either of schism or of bigotry in these sentences; how much is there of the spirit of the Christian reformer! The four brethren unanimously declared that they expressed substantially their own position and sentiments.†

The accession of such a man as Ralph Erskine at this juncture to the ranks of the seceding Fathers, must have operated not a little to the advantage of their cause. With powers of natural eloquence equal to those of his elder brother, he perhaps even surpassed him in melting pathos, in mental acuteness, and in his command of those 'thick-coming fancies' which, by riveting the attention and interesting the imagination, secure for truth a lodgment in the memory. The consequence was, that he already possessed an eminence and acceptability as a preacher in which he was excelled by no contemporary, while his general character was justly held by all in high veneration. His Gospel Sonnets, too, many of which had already been given to the world, in which divine truth is often presented in quaint paradoxes and happy conceits, had obtained a universal circulation among the Scottish peasantry, and though, like the cocoa nut, the wholesome nourishment was sometimes contained in a rough shell which it was difficult to break, even educated men overlooked the occasionally unpolished diction and inharmonious rhymes for the sake of the solid and saving truth of which they were found to be the vehicle. That indeed must have been no common man, to whom Whitefield owned himself indebted for a more clear and evangelical theology,‡ whose writings the author of 'Theron and Aspasio' preferred above all other uninspired productions as the companion and solace of his dying hours,§ and whose

\* Act concerning the Admission of the Rev. Ralph Erskine and Mr. Thomas Mair as Members of Presbytery.

† Brown's History of the Secession, p. 25.

‡ Frazer's Memoirs of R. Erskine, pp. 316—324. Also, Letters by the Rev. G. Whitefield, *passim*.

§ Brown's Life of Hervey, p. 397.



words the great Andrew Fuller acknowledged had awakened him to conviction and melted him to tears.\* The addition of such a man to the little band of Reformers, an addition so manifestly the fruit of deliberate conviction, was a large increase at once to its intellectual efficiency and to its moral power. We are not surprised that in tracing his visits to the suffering districts in this and following years, scarcely a place is named which did not eventually become the seat of a Secession church.†

An event occurred about this time which, both as putting to the test the reigning spirit in the judicatories of the Scottish Church, and bringing out in practical contrast the fearless attachment to principle and independence of the Seceders, undoubtedly told with considerable influence at the moment in advancing their cause,—we refer to what is commonly known in history by the title of the Porteous mob. The leading incidents connected with this affair, forming as they do one of the most extraordinary chapters in the records of the last century, and even seized upon because of the stirring adventure, the mighty opposition of contending passions which they exhibit, as well as the partial mystery that envelopes them, as a fit theme for the arts and embellishments of fiction, belong rather to the province of civil than of ecclesiastical history, and therefore do not properly come within the range of our narrative. We can only remind our readers of the more prominent features in that strangely chequered and exciting event,—of the condemnation of Wilson and his associate for the robbery of a custom-house on the coast of Fife, in order to indemnify themselves for the losses they had sustained through the vigilance of the revenue officers,—of the strong sympathy with Wilson felt by the Scottish populace, who in those days looked upon smuggling as but a venial offence,—of the in-

\* Memoir of Andrew Fuller, by his Son, prefixed to his Works, p. 11.

† We meet with the following among other places in his Diary,—Denny, Balfroun, W. Linton, Cambusnethan, Kilmaurs, Kilmarnock, Kilwinning.

crease of this sympathy into admiration by the courageous and successful attempt of Wilson to rescue his associate, on the Sabbath before the execution,—of the dread on the part of the authorities that the people, borne away by their enthusiasm, would attempt to rescue Wilson from his fate, and their consequent surrounding of the scaffold with a large body of the town-guard, who were supplied on the occasion with guns and ammunition, and placed under the command of Captain Porteous,—of the immense multitude beholding the execution with outward calmness, but their exasperated feelings at length bursting out in indignant reproaches, while some began to pelt the guard with stones,—of the guard immediately firing on the multitude, killing some, and wounding others, who had had no share in the violence,—of the immediate imprisonment of Porteous, and his subsequent trial and condemnation to death, as having exceeded his authority, and occasioned the loss of so many lives without a sufficient cause,—of the unexpected reprieve of Porteous by royal authority, when the people had assembled in vast multitudes to behold his execution,—of their deep vows of vengeance,—of their reassembling in the evening, securing the city gates, cutting off all communication with the Castle, disarming the city-guard, forcing the doors of the jail, and dragging the unhappy man from the chimney in his cell, where he had concealed himself, putting him to death by suspending him from a dyer's pole, in the place where Wilson, a few weeks before, had perished.

So bold a defiance of law, committed with such evident deliberation and concert, excited the astonishment and indignation of the government, and it was determined to use every effort to discover the perpetrators, and to inflict upon them severe and summary vengeance. On the assembling of Parliament, an act was passed, ordaining all persons who were charged with being accessory to the murder of Captain Porteous, on pain of death to surrender themselves for trial within a limited time, adjudging all persons to the same punishment who should be found guilty of concealing

the fugitives, offering pardon to guilty persons who should give evidence against their associates, and promising a reward of £200 to informers, who should also be admitted as witnesses. One is apt to imagine, in reading such provisions as these, so repugnant to the spirit of constitutional liberty, that he is studying by mistake some of the despotic and sanguinary edicts of the age that preceded the Revolution. But the provisions that bring this event into such strange connexion with the ecclesiastical history of the period are the following:—Every minister of the Church of Scotland was required to read this act from the pulpit, in the time of public worship, on the first Lord's day of every month, for one whole year. Whosoever refused obedience was, for the first offence, declared incapable of sitting or voting in any church judicatory; and for the second, incapable of taking, holding, or enjoying any ecclesiastical benefice in Scotland. And these ecclesiastical penalties were appointed to be executed by the Court of Session, or any court of justiciary, upon a summary complaint at the instance of his Majesty's advocate!

It has been supposed by some, that an impression prevailed at this period among those in power, that the Scottish clergy in general had not been sufficiently careful to inculcate upon the people a spirit of submission to civil authority, and that this extraordinary injunction, while intended to aid in detecting the active parties in the assassination of Porteous, was also meant to humble the clergy, and impress them with the real dependence of their position. Most certainly it had all the appearance of studied insult and deliberate invasion of their authority. The hours sacred to religion were commanded to be profaned by an act most uncongenial and revolting; those who were sent forth as the heralds of peace were required to become the heralds of earthly and sanguinary laws; human power, without disguise, stepped within the sacred circle of ecclesiastical authority, where it was profanity for it to tread, and wresting the keys of discipline and government from the hands of their rightful possessors, pro-

ceeded at once to dictate and to administer its laws. What was this but degrading the ministers of the gospel into a state of mere political servitude, and the man who should obey the insulting mandate, when associated with such penalties, would be acknowledging this bondage, and assuming with his own hand the servile badge.

Men looked on to see how far the ministers of the Church of Scotland would bow to this assumption of Erastian supremacy. Some there were who scorned to obey a mandate which at once violated their consciences and trampled on their rights, and nobly set at defiance all the threatened penalties. But by far the greater number ignobly succumbed; some, attempting an impossible compromise between conscience and the fear of man, read only part of the insulting document, or reserved the reading of it till the people had dispersed, while others read the whole at the set times, and throughout the prescribed period. But the general conduct of the ministers was abject and servile, nor was any voice ever raised against the invasion of their own and their Master's prerogative, either by the Assembly or by the inferior judicatories. Who can wonder that the spirit of alienation spread wider and deeper among the people. Multitudes, aggrieved and offended by the timid servility of their ministers, left their parish churches on the first reading of the act, and placed themselves under the ministrations of those who had resisted the command, or more frequently still, swelled the ranks of those little societies which had sought liberty, and found it, in secession. Two other ministers left the Establishment in the midst of these commotions, and, adopting the testimony of the Associate Presbytery, increased their numbers to eight, the Rev. Thomas Nairn of Abbotshall and the Rev. James Thomson of Burntisland.

It would be a truly uncongenial and monotonous task to continue describing the numerous cases of violent settlement that deform the history of this and the following years. The spirit of corruption and oppression, as if in revenge for the restraint which events had put on it for a

time, overleaped the barriers, not only of consistency but of decency. In the one Assembly of 1737, the immediate follower of that which had issued its formal declaration of the right of the people to elect their own ministers, we find Perth, Duffus, Monikie, Madderty, and several other places enumerated, as the scenes of violent intrusions, and the decision in the case of Denny, which a new appeal brought up before this Assembly, displays such an utter contempt not only of the popular will but of the rights of conscience, as is sufficient of itself to brand a whole church with dishonour. It will be remembered that the Presbytery of Stirling had been commanded by the last Assembly, in the face of its own act, to proceed to the settlement of the presentee at Denny. This command the presbytery, basing its refusal on the general principle so ostentatiously proclaimed, had ventured to disobey. A few heritors, probably non-resident, lodged a complaint before the Assembly. What then was its decision? The presbytery were blamed for refusing to obey the instructions of the last Assembly, and enjoined to proceed forthwith to the settlement of the presentee, as they would be answerable to the next Assembly. In the event of their continued refusal, the Synod of Perth was instructed to take up the case, with this most scandalous provision, that they should not be at liberty to consider the question whether it was right for them to obey or not. Should the majority of the synod prove refractory also, any ten or more of their number were at liberty to proceed as above directed, and the settlement would be valid. And should ten men not be found in the synod sufficiently servile for this work, the commission was once more confidently looked to as the forlorn hope and ready agent of corruption, and appointed to convene at Edinburgh, in the Old Kirk Aisle, on the third Wednesday of November or March respectively, in order to take on trials and ordain Mr. James Stirling as minister of Denny.\* Thus recklessly were the rights of the people, their spiritual

\* Acts of Assembly, 1737.



interests which were utterly neglected while this case 'dragged its slow length along' from one Assembly to another, and the consciences of presbyteries, all trampled under foot by the hoof of ecclesiastical authority. It was well for the religion and the liberties of Scotland that a body had arisen which stood forth as the bold denouncer of such tyrannies and the earnest redresser of such wrongs. And that many in Scotland now began to see this, is proved by the fact that, in one year, applications were laid upon the table of the Associate Presbytery from more than seventy societies, adhering to their testimony and praying to be congregated and supplied with the blessings of a regular ministry.

The rulers in the church were agitated by a new alarm, as they looked around them on the progress of the Secession, the mingled boldness and caution of its leaders, and the unequivocal and deepening interest of the people. They looked and wondered 'whereunto all this would grow.' What was to be done? Conciliation had been attempted by a show of concession, and had failed. They had hoped that the lapse of time would diminish the popular excitement, every year had beheld its increase. Two alternatives only remained,—to yield to the claims of the Seceders, and enter on a course of substantial reformation, or pursuing the course on which they had long been proceeding, to break in sunder every link of connexion with these troublers of their peace, trust to their authority and influence, and set them at defiance. They preferred the latter alternative. It only remains then that we trace with rapid pen the various steps in the process by which the last bond of connexion was severed between the Seceders and the corrupt judicatories of the Establishment, and the Secession stood forth distinctly and visibly before the world, as a separate and independent religious community.

When the Assembly met in 1738, a representation was laid upon its table from the Synod of Perth, complaining of 'the disorderly practices of certain Seceding ministers.' The Assembly entertained the complaint as well founded,



and appointed the Commission to take all proper steps for duly sisting the separating brethren before the next Assembly, there to answer for their irregular conduct. This appointment was accompanied with an earnest recommendation to all the ministers, elders, and members of the church, to use every proper means for reclaiming 'the poor deluded people'\* who had been carried away by this division, and for preventing the increase of the schism.

The Commission, prompt to obey the injunctions of the Assembly, framed a libel against each of the Seceding ministers, and duly serving it upon them individually, cited them to appear before the next Assembly, 'to meet at Edinburgh the tenth day of May, 1739 years, within the Assembly house there, in the hour of cause.' The charges contained in the libel were, substantially, their separation from the church, their erecting themselves into a presbytery, their emitting an Act, Declaration and Testimony, their condemning the judicatures of the church, their leaving their own parishes and administering ordinances in different parts of the country, their taking some persons under probationary trials, and licensing one or more to preach the gospel, all of which were characterized in the libel as 'high crimes.'† Severe epithets came readily enough to the minds of these rulers, when their hearts were in their work. Over the bold heresies of Professor Campbell they had satisfied themselves with the most soft and soothing generalities, scarcely presuming 'to hint a fault or hesitate dislike;' the honest adherence of these good men to principle in the face of authority and the acts to which this adherence led, were high crimes. 'If the Judicatories of this National Church,' said William Wilson, 'had done their duty, the Seceding Brethren would not have had ground for their association, or for such a procedure.'‡

When the Assembly met, they resolved, after deliberat-

\* Acts of Assembly, 1738.

† Index to Unprinted Acts of Assembly, 1739.

‡ Defence of the Reformation Principles, &c., p. 171.

ing two days on the subject, to proceed on the libel transmitted from the Commission. Meanwhile the eight brethren had met and passed an act entitled 'The Declinature,'\* in which they disclaimed the Assembly's authority over them, and maintained their 'own independent right, liberty and determination, in the name of Christ, to exercise all the functions of their ministry,' in as full and ample a manner as hitherto they had done. The grounds stated by them in their declinature, were substantially the same as their grounds of Secession. How could they submit to the judicatories of the church, when those judicatories were employing their authority against its constitution and interests. Their course of defection from which nothing had sufficed to reclaim them, absolved the Seceding brethren from obedience, and practically shut them up to the necessity of renouncing their authority, that they might have respect to God's. It had been the defence of Reformers in Scotland before, and it was valid now.

On the 18th day of the month, the eight brethren having been called, appeared as a constituted presbytery at the bar of the Assembly. The Moderator intimated to them on their entrance, that notwithstanding all that had passed, the Assembly was willing to receive them with open arms, if they would return into the bosom of the church. Strange generosity to men who had been denounced as schismatics, and at that moment stood charged in the libel with ten 'high crimes.' The Rev. Thomas Mair replied as Moderator of the Associate Presbytery, that they had come to the Assembly's bar as a constituted Presbytery, and that he was ready, as their mouth, to read an Act which expressed their united judgment. On this reply the Assembly commanded the libel to be read, immediately after which Mr. Mair read the Declinature, and then having delivered it to the Moderator of the Assembly, he and the other members of the little band withdrew. It was the last occasion of

† Gib's Display, pp. 165—171.

formal intercourse between the Seceding Fathers and the Scottish Church.

Astonished and irritated by the consistent and immovable firmness of the eight brethren, which the Assembly characterized as 'unparalleled boldness,'\* they would in all likelihood have proceeded at once to depose them from the ministry; had not the protest entered by Mr. Willison and others, when the libel was first resolved on, showed them that there were still men in their ranks whose sympathies were with the Seceders, and that severe or precipitate measures against them, might possibly lead to new desertions. The deposition therefore which they declared to be merited was postponed to another year, but the next Assembly was strongly recommended to avoid further delay, and unless the Seceding ministers in the meantime retraced their steps, to inflict the censure and expel them from the church.

On the twelfth day of May, 1740, the Assembly proceeded to consider the recommendation of the last Assembly respecting the Seceding brethren, and on the 15th pronounced upon them the sentence of deposition from the holy ministry. 'The General Assembly did and hereby do, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by Him to them, actually Depose Messrs. Ebenezer Erskine at Stirling, William Wilson at Perth, Alexander Moncrieff at Abernethy, James Fisher at Kinclaven, Ralph Erskine at Dunfermline, Thomas Mair at Orwell, Thomas Nairn at Abbotshall, and James Thomson at Burntisland, ministers, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging them, and every one of them, to exercise the same or any part thereof within this church, in all time coming.'† Might it not have been asked, as the Roman judge had once asked regarding their divine Master, 'Why, what evil had they done?' But the

\* Printed Acts of Assembly, 1739.

† Acts of Assembly, 1740.

depositions of Assemblies are no more valid than the anathemas of popes, when they are essentially unjust. Assuredly this act was not ratified in heaven.

Though no act of ecclesiastical authority could deprive these excellent men of their flocks, the Assembly's sentence deprived them both of their places of worship and emoluments; and care was taken that the Moderator should immediately write to the civil authorities in their respective districts, informing them of the sentence and requesting that they should at once be dispossessed. To the honour of the magistrates in some places, the Seceding brethren were allowed to retain their pulpits, till new places of worship were reared for them. This was the case with Mr. Ralph Erskine at Dunfermline and with Mr. Thomson at Burntisland. But in other cases the treatment was far different, and occasioned scenes in some instances of touching pathos, in others rising to the morally sublime. At Abernethy Mr. Moncrieff, with characteristic determination, refused to enter the pulpit of the parish church after his deposition, and exposed to the winds and snows of a whole winter, preached to his people in the open air. Mr. Nairn at Abbotshall was allowed to retain undisturbed possession of his church until the month of October, when the heritors 'at their own hands,' says Mr. Wilson in his Defence, 'locked the church and church-yard doors, and nailed iron plates on the key-holes of the said doors!'

At Stirling on the first Lord's day after Mr. Erskine's deposition, the church bells were forbidden to be rung, and the people on assembling at the usual hour found the doors of the church and churchyard made fast to prevent their entrance. The exasperated multitude were about to proceed to violent measures to effect an entrance, but their venerable pastor having made his appearance, and expressing his disapproval of all violent measures, succeeded in dissuading them from the attempt. Then in the pre-

\* Continuation of Wilson's Defence, p. 91.

sence of the immense multitude whom the interesting occasion had brought together, he lifted up the pulpit bible which according to the custom of the times he had brought with him from his house, and with that majestic manner which was so natural to him, and with awfully impressive solemnity of tone protested as in the divine presence that he was now obeying the dictates of duty, and that not he but his opposers were responsible at the judgment seat of God for the scenes of that day. The words spread a thrill of deep emotion throughout the vast assembly—more especially as they looked on the grey hairs and majestic form of the venerable sufferer; but every thought of violence had given way to holier feelings, and quietly retiring to a convenient spot in the open air, they listened to the ministrations of this dauntless witness, whom they now began to regard not only with the affection due to a pastor, but with something of the veneration claimed by a martyr.

The place selected for the solemn service was such as to harmonize with the state of mind of the worshippers, and to provide the vast multitude with a fitting sanctuary. To this day the visitor to Stirling is guided to a verdant and elevated spot that rises to the northward of that ancient seat of kings. Here,—with the frowning ramparts of the castle rising above him—rich and waving plains beneath, amid which the ‘many-linked’ Forth seeks his majestic way and begins his strange and mazy circles as if loath to leave so fair a scene, with far in the distance the noble Grampians raising their bold and rugged pinnacles into the clouds,—did this Father of the Secession gather together his scattered sheep, and rear, as it were in visible form, the standard which bore inscribed on it ‘Christ’s crown’ and ‘His people’s rights.’

The first portion of the sixtieth psalm was given out by Mr. Erskine to be sung, and very appropriately opened the services of the day:—

“O Lord, thou hast rejected us,  
And scatter’d us abroad;

Thou justly hast displeased been;  
Return to us, O God.  
The earth to tremble thou hast made;  
Therein didst breaches make:  
Do thou therefore the breaches heal,  
Because the land doth shake."

A solemn prayer followed; after which the venerable man read as his text those words of Matt. viii. 27. 'But the men marvelled, saying, what manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him.' The sermon which followed was one which those who heard never could forget. The occasion, the scene, the subject all tended to elevate both speaker and hearers into a higher region, and made holy eloquence sound like inspiration. It was a day of deep and varied emotions. Some were saddened to tears when they thought of the precious minister whom the Church of Scotland had driven from her pale, in others joy in the truths which they had heard swallowed up for the time all other feelings, while hoary headed men felt the recollections of youth suddenly revived, and those who had been active in the proceedings of that day, seemed to their minds to have 'served themselves heirs to the iniquity and wickedness of some of their forefathers in that place, who stoned that eminent seer and faithful martyr Mr. James Guthrie.'\*

But the scenes at Perth have been the most minutely recorded, and form unquestionably one of the most interesting pages in the early history of the Secession. We give the description almost entirely in the words of Mr. Wilson's respected descendant and biographer.

'On the morning of the Lord's day, when the Assembly's instructions to the civil powers, just that morning received, were to be carried into effect, Mr. Wilson and his interesting family, who were very regular in their domestic habits, were observed by the servants to be in a state of uncommon concern. Though the cause was in a great measure

\* Frazer's Memoirs of E. Erskine, p. 414. Wilson's Continuation of Defence, p. 91.



unknown to the domestics, they perceived that something unusual had occurred. The breakfast table was laid at the usual hour: but Mr. and Mrs. Wilson continued closely shut up in their chamber, and seemed, in deep thoughtfulness, to forget their wonted habits, and to be so entirely engaged in intercourse with God, as to be above the cares of this life, and to forget, or not to feel, the common cravings of nature.

‘Mr. Wilson remained in his chamber till the hour of public worship. On leaving it, he went directly to the church. As he left the house to proceed, on this trying day, to the discharge of his ministerial duties, an aged domestic, long an inmate of the family,—the same who in earlier times had served his father in the Mearns moor with daily nourishment, when he was driven from his house and his property by the violence of the persecution,—ventured to accost him in the language of friendly caution, “Tak care what ye’re doin’, Mr. William,” said she, for so from early habits she still sometimes called him, “tak care what ye’re doin’, for I fear if things gang on this way, I’ll get ye’re food to carry to the muir, as I did ye’re father’s before ye.”

‘Mr. Wilson, in the prospect of these movements, took along with him Mr. Andrew Ferrier, writer in Perth, a gentleman of the highest respectability, and with whom he was in habits of friendship. In company with him, Mr. Wilson proceeded, with his usual dignified composure and gravity, towards the House of God. An immense multitude had assembled on the streets around the building. An expectation that something more than common was to take place had been very generally excited. The doors were shut; and the magistrates of the city, with their badges of authority and guards, were drawn up in front to obstruct Mr. Wilson’s entrance. In this they might pretend to be in the discharge of their duty; but doubtless, here, as in other places, magistrates had a discretionary power to decline exercising the rigour of their authority.

‘Mr. Wilson, undaunted, advanced to the main entrance.

and addressing those authorities who guarded it, demanded admission by an authority higher than theirs. "In the name of my Divine Master," said the venerable pastor, "I demand admission into his temple." The demand was thrice made in the same manner, and thrice met with a determined and stern refusal. On this there was a simultaneous stir in the crowd, and those who had seen or heard the repeated demands and refusals of entrance, became indignant and impatient, and were about to stone the civil authorities of the city, and to force an entrance for the minister they loved. But, perceiving their designs, Mr. Wilson, with affectionate and commanding dignity, turned to the crowd, and firmly forbade the execution of their purpose. "No violence," said he, "my friends;—the Master whom I serve is the *Prince of Peace*."

'Mr. Ferrier, in the mean time, having endeavoured in vain to procure admission for his minister, solemnly protested against the conduct of the magistrates; and on remarking that they could justify themselves neither before God nor men for their proceedings that day,—was told in reply, that "they would take men in their own hands, and would answer to God when they were called."

'At this interesting juncture, the Deacon of the Glovers' Corporation stepped forward, and said to Mr. Wilson, that if he would accept of the Glovers' Yard for the services of the day, he was most welcome to it. The kind and seasonable offer was most readily and thankfully accepted. Thither he immediately retired, followed by an immense concourse of people. An erection was soon obtained, where he might conveniently conduct the public worship of God.

'In the mean time, "Mr. John Hally, then a probationer, employed by Mr. David Black to preach that day, being attended by the said Mr. Black, was, with the assistance of the magistrates, thrust into the pulpit."

'During these proceedings, Mr. Wilson was quite composed. The trying scene had not unfitted him for the discharge of those duties in which he delighted, and his sphere of usefulness was, by these events, much extended. Many

thousands more than the church could have contained flocked around him in the Glovers' Yard, some, doubtless, prompted by curiosity alone, but by far the greater number deeply interested in the occurrences of the times, and determined to adhere to their godly minister.

'There was something highly appropriate, and peculiarly expressive of the feelings of this excellent Father of the Secession, in the psalm with which he commenced, in the open air, the public solemnities of the Sabbath:—

"He was no foe that me reproach'd,  
Then that endure I could;  
Nor hater that did 'gainst me boast,  
From him me hide I would.  
But thou man, who mine equal, guide,  
And mine acquaintance wast:  
We join'd sweet counsels, to God's house  
In company we pass'd."

'The prayer, we doubt not, accorded with the peculiar circumstances in which he and his fellow-worshippers were placed,—breathing the devout feelings of his heart,—showing how resigned he was to the disposing will of the God of providence,—and how anxious he was that the events of the day in particular, and of the times in general, might be rendered subservient to the Divine glory and to the prosperity of the church.

'When he opened the sacred volume the text he read produced a thrill in every heart, and especially among the more thoughtful part of the audience: "LET US GO FORTH THEREFORE UNTO HIM, WITHOUT THE CAMP, BEARING HIS REPROACH."

'The devotional exercises of this eventful Sabbath were throughout solemn and interesting, and much calculated to make a deep and lasting impression on those who witnessed them. When the work of the day was over, Mr. Wilson, on returning home, went directly to his study, tired and worn out with his anxieties and exertions. Isabella, his eldest daughter, then but twelve years of age, but who, attended by one of the servants, had witnessed the whole extraordinary scene,—a scene which she dis-

tinctly remembered as long as she lived, and often mentioned to her family with the deepest interest,—felt very curious to understand from her father the meaning of what had taken place, but not liking to ask him, she hung about the door of his apartment till he observed her, and perceived what were her feelings and wishes. He then called her, and said,—‘Bell, this has been a day of trial, but we have reason to be thankful that it has not been a day of shame. If any one ask you, Bell, why your father lost his kirk, you may just say, as good Mr. Guthrie, before his death, directed my mother to say of him, if she were asked why he lost his head,—“that it was in a good cause.”’\*

The last link which had bound the Seceders to the Established Church was now effectually severed, and the Secession Church stood forth among the nations as a witness for truth and freedom. She had come out of a Reformation church; but it was not the first time since the days of Luther that a Reformation church had itself needed to be reformed. It is at this point especially that we must take our stand, and looking down the intervening century, mark how far she has discharged the commission which her God put into her hands, and estimate what has been the measure of her beneficent influence upon the religion of Scotland and the religious privileges of her people. This we shall endeavour to accomplish in our concluding chapter.

\* Ferrier's *Memoirs of W. Wilson*, pp. 336—343.

## CHAPTER IV.

### RESULTS OF THE SECESSION.

Refusal of Sites—Loyalty of the Seceders—Adam Gib—Whitefield—Unhappy alienation—Cambuslang—Act concerning the Doctrine of grace—Mr. Nairn—Progress—THE ASSOCIATE SYNOD—Lowering clouds—THE BREACH—Two Streams—State of Scottish Church—Formation of Relief Presbytery—Principal Robertson—Kirk of Shotts—The dark age—Moderatism—M'Gill of Ayr—Orkney—America—Nova Scotia—Occasional storms—The Civil Magistrate—Right practice with defective theory—Prejudices subsiding—THE UNION—Growth of Missionary spirit—The Voluntary principle—Alarm in the Established Church—Church Extension Scheme—The Veto Act—Secession and Relief movements towards union—Atonement controversy—Desire for union grows—Tanfield—THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH—Estimate of results—The Secession and religious truth—Religious liberty—Religious literature—Conclusion.

THE meeting beneath the thatched roof at Gairney Bridge, or the period at which the Brethren were deposed,—either of these may be taken as the point from which to measure the progress of the Secession during the century and more that has intervened since.

It is not our province minutely to trace the subsequent history of the Secession, detailing the proceedings of its Synods from year to year; but it seems necessary, in order to accomplishing the main design of this concluding chapter, that we should point out the great landmarks or periods of the century, noticing their characteristic features and salient points, while we gratefully and confidently refer the reader for more abundant details to the ample and accurate pages of Dr. M'Kerrow's History.

The *first period*, beginning with the deposition of the eight brethren, was chequered by more than one trying occurrence. Among the more ignorant classes and 'lewd

people of the baser sort,' popular disturbances were raised to disturb the meetings of the Seceders, while the same spirit of opposition showed itself among men in power in the refusal of sites for churches, and in threats of intimidation addressed to tenants and dependents whose piety or sense of justice led them to sympathize with the Secession. It was a hardy child that Providence was now rearing, destined for long and faithful service, and it was fit that it should be thus 'nursed on the rock and cradled by the storm.'

In nothing perhaps did the virulence of the corrupt party that had deposed them show itself more than in insinuations against the loyalty of the Seceders,—insinuations much more dangerous a century ago than now. Even in the house of Lords some years before, the Duke of Argyle had thrown out the infamous surmise that they were to be blamed for the Porteous mob, an event of which they were as innocent as the first Christians of the burning of Rome in the days of Nero. Providence afforded them in the rebellion of 1745 an early opportunity of answering the gratuitous calumnies. Among no class of men in Scotland did the cause of the Pretender find more resolute resistance, and the house of Hanover more enthusiastic supporters than among the Scottish Seceders. Their loyalty was not only earnest but exuberant, for to their minds there seemed at once involved in the struggle their civil rights and the interests of protestantism. A regiment was formed almost exclusively of Seceders. When the Pretender was understood to be approaching Stirling, Mr. Erskine, though now advanced in years, presented himself at the castle dressed in military costume and ready to mount guard for the night.\* When the troops of the Pretender at length en-

\* Some gentlemen on guard, surprised to see the venerable minister in such unclerical attire, recommended him to go home to his prayers as more suitable to his vocation. 'I am determined,' was his spirited reply, 'to take the hazard of the night along with you; for the present crisis requires the *arms* as well as the *prayers* of all good subjects.' Frazer's Life of E. Erskine, p. 439.



tered Edinburgh, a company of the Seceders who were posted at one of the most important stations were the last to abandon their position. And at Colinton in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, Adam Gib preached from a tent to a large concourse of people, and while the armed and frowning followers of Charles were standing on the outskirts of the audience, represented to his hearers the imminence of the crisis, and urged them to uphold, even to the loss of all things, the present government and dynasty. The Seceders showed themselves as ready, in this unbought loyalty, to 'render unto Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's,' as they had shown themselves in their secession to 'render unto God the things which were God's.'

Even before the period of these loyal manifestations by the Seceders, an unhappy feud had occurred between them and one who had been accomplishing for England what they had seceded in order to accomplish for Scotland, the revival of vital religion among the people, which in both countries had suffered incalculable injury from the unfaithfulness and inaction of the National Church. Occupying towards their respective countries a somewhat similar relation, nothing seemed more natural or desirable than that George Whitefield and the Erskines should regard each other with mutual interest and affection, and encourage each other in the great mission to which they appeared in the providence of God to have been simultaneously called. This mutual interest and affection did indeed exist for a time, but it is impossible to remember without deep regret that it was soon followed by serious misunderstanding, open rupture, and even mutual reproach. We have no intention to enter fully into the merits of the controversy between the great English evangelist and the Scottish Seceders, and yet, even in a sketch like this, it is impossible to avoid touching on it, more especially as in the wars of religious factions it has often been referred to since at the expense of modern Seceders with undistinguishing severity, as a convenient instrument of assault where a little odium gathered from the past might help out the purposes of pre-

sent argument. The partiality would be highly blameable that would vindicate or excuse the first Seceders in this matter, the prejudice would be unpardonable that would load them with unmeasured reproach, or bring out either Whitefield or his later associates free of blame.

The principal elements in the case were these: The Erskines hearing of the extraordinary success of Whitefield in England, entered into correspondence with him, expressing their joy at his movements, and informing him at the same time of their own proceedings and success. Whitefield replied in terms of high respect and affection, congratulating the Seceders on their position and prospects, expressing the deepest interest in their success, and longing for personal intercourse with men whom he so greatly loved, and from whom he believed he might obtain the greatest advantage. This was followed by an invitation on the part of the Seceders to Scotland, both that they might enjoy the pleasures of mutual intercourse, and Scotland receive the benefit of his extraordinary ministry. Mr. Whitefield was at the same time reminded with a manly and prudent foresight that does the Seceders honour, of the peculiar position in which they stood to the Scottish Church, as having left its communion on account of its crying abuses, and the suggestion was thrown out that close fellowship with the ministers of the Establishment would seriously weaken their position, and give to a corrupt body, which had just driven them from its pale, the benefit of his moral influence and amazing popularity. They were ready to welcome him to Scotland though there might be a difference between him and them on certain points, and their hope was that intercourse and prayer would diminish those differences and make their unity complete. Mr. Whitefield wrote accepting the invitation, concurring in the hope of more complete harmony of view as the result of their communications, and wishing to sit at the feet of these venerable men and be taught.

He came to Scotland, and, waited on by Ralph Erskine at Edinburgh, went with him to Dunfermline. There the

other Seceding brethren welcomed the great preacher, and hailed his visit as the harbinger of blessed results. A conference was soon proposed between them and Whitefield, and that conference was the unhappy occasion of alienation and rupture. Encouraged by the strong expressions in Whitefield's letters, in which he had confessed his imperfect knowledge on many points, and his willingness to receive light, the Seceders offered to converse with him on the question of Church government. He was gathering around him thousands of converts, it was necessary for the permanent success of his labours that these converts should be cared for and formed into churches, the question therefore seemed one that did not admit of long delay, what was the form of Church government sanctioned by Scripture. Was it Episcopacy? Was it Presbytery? They were anxious to convince him in behalf of the latter model. Mr. Whitefield declined to entertain the question, angry feelings were awakened,—Whitefield, invited by the ministers of the National Church, became more identified with them in his labours,—the Seceders began to use language regarding him unduly depreciating, while he in his turn began to utter unfavourable predictions regarding them which were not destined to be fulfilled. 'The Seceders,' said he, 'are building a Babel which will soon fall about their own ears.'

He would be a bold and reckless partisan who should pronounce either the Scottish Seceders or the English preacher blameless. If the former were too prompt in inviting conference with Whitefield on disputed points, it should be remembered that his own letters had encouraged the thought that such a conference was desired. If the Seceders expected more regard for their position than was reasonable, he on the other hand displayed an indifference to that position which was extremely irritating; and inconsistent with his own previous professions. The Seceders have been blamed for wishing that Whitefield should preach only from their pulpits or in places provided by them, we join in the condemnation; though we find some difficulty in

discovering the quarter from which it can consistently come. Greater instances of illiberality have been repeatedly displayed in our own times, without the many palliating circumstances that render the fault of the Seceders comparatively venial, and we may boldly turn to every leading denomination in Scotland, and say, 'Let him that is without guilt among you, throw the first stone.'

The same candid consideration of circumstances is necessary in judging of the conduct of the Seceders, when not long afterwards Whitefield returned to Scotland a second time, at the invitation of ministers of the Establishment, and obtained such a remarkable blessing upon his ministry in the revivals at Cambuslang. No Christian now will fail to acknowledge in that work, with all its physical excitement and disorder, a revival from on high. But the Seceders, looking too exclusively at its cases of temporary excitement and disorder, spoke of the whole in terms of unwarrantable doubt, and even in some instances of condemnation. For this they are to be blamed; but let us at the same time do the Seceding Fathers justice, and keep in mind how that work of God was attempted to be turned by the partisans of the Established Church to the worst purposes of faction and corruption. 'See,' said they to the Seceders, '*you* have left the Establishment, but the Spirit of God has not.' The Seceders might have replied triumphantly, that the same plea might have been urged by a Romanist in defence of the Church of Rome, and used to place the brand of schism upon the glorious Reformation. God had always had a people in that apostate church, and had sometimes produced in particular sections of it remarkable revivals; and yet the command of God, at those very moments of revival, was, 'Come out of her my people.' Did the conversions by the pastor Oberlin amid his alpine recesses consecrate the corruptions of that Romish communion to which the simple-minded evangelist continued nominally to adhere? But the Seceding Fathers, instead of rejecting the presumptuous conclusion, denied the fact, and this denial was one of the worst errors ever committed by

these good men. It is pleasing to think that at a later period even the severest among them blamed himself—and that Whitefield and Ralph Erskine were afterwards reconciled with mutual embraces and tears.

It is remarkable, that even amid these disturbances and dissensions the cause of the Secession advanced. Let us trace its progress.

Disentangled from the Established Church, the brethren had lost no time in giving themselves to their proper work, and emitting seasonable documents, such as they imagined to be demanded by the claims of truth and the position of ecclesiastical affairs. One of the most valuable documents ever authoritatively put forth by the Secession Church owes its existence to this period; we refer to the 'Act concerning the doctrine of grace,' which, after elaborate preparation and anxious revision, appeared in 1742. In this Act, the Secession Fathers raise the standard of the Marrow doctrine, for which they had so nobly struggled in the Establishment, and proclaim its doctrine as their own. It was the first work emitted by them after their deposition, and it is difficult to name a better use that could have been made by them of their liberty. With the ignominious brand of the Assembly still imprinted on the Marrow, consistency as well as duty seemed to demand of the Seceders that they should embrace the earliest opportunity of formally declaring their undiminished love for its momentous and living verities. With a measure of prolixity that ill suits the taste of the present age, and with the occasional appearance of those strong and paradoxical expressions that deform the Marrow itself, the Act is distinguished by those clear exhibitions of a free gospel resting on the basis of an all-perfect atonement—those representations of 'grace reigning through righteousness,' and producing in the reception of it the spirit of an unconstrained and happy obedience, which give strength to personal holiness and its greatest power to a Christian ministry. It was well that such an act should at once strike the key-note of Secession preaching.



Scarcely had the 'Act concerning the doctrine of grace' been published, when the adoption of sentiments by Mr. Nairn that were believed to be subversive of civil government, occasioned a declaration by the Seceders on the power and province of the civil magistrate,—a declaration which proved that the views of the Seceders on this point were already in advance of the Establishment which they had left behind them, and which, in the principles which it embodied, and in the discussions and controversies of which it formed the repeated material, contributed much to lead minds both within the pale of the Secession and beyond it, to sound and enlightened views on the rights of conscience.

The following paragraph, defining with distinct and vigorous hand the true province of civil magistracy, became memorable in many a subsequent controversy. 'The public good of outward and common order in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with magistracy can propose, in a sole respect unto that office. And as, in prosecuting this end civilly, according to their office, it is only over men's good and evil works that they can have any inspection, so it is only over these which they must needs take cognizance of for the said public good; while, at the same time, their doing so must be in such a manner, and proceed so far alienably, as is requisite for that end, without assuming any lordship immediately over men's consciences, or making any encroachment upon the special privileges and business of the church. And moreover, as the whole institution and end of their office are cut out by, and lie within, the compass of natural principles, it were absurd to suppose, that there could or ought to be any exercise thereof towards its end, in the foresaid circumstances, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles; as indeed there is nothing especially allotted and allowed unto magistrates, by the word of God and the Confessions of the reformed churches, but what can be so.\* The prin-

\* Gib's Display, p. 311.



ciple contained in these sentences needed only to be followed out to its legitimate results, in order to place the Seceders as the unflinching antagonists of every form of magistratical intrusion or coercion in regard to ecclesiastical affairs. It was the little leaven in the three measures of meal, destined to leaven the whole lump.

The infant cause continued to strengthen and extend on every side, and gave every indication that it was obtaining a growing hold upon the public mind. Licentiates were seen leaving the Establishment and adhering to the standard and testimony of the Seceders; applications for sermon came from so many quarters that to have attended to them would have required on the part of the brethren an almost constant absence from their own flocks; congregations were already organized in England and Ireland; and in one year the number of students attending the theological hall exceeded those attending any of the universities, except Edinburgh.\* To meet the inconveniences arising from the increase of the body, the ministers and elders were arranged into three presbyteries under one synod, and at the first meeting of the ASSOCIATE SYNOD, about thirty settled congregations and thirteen vacancies were reported as connected with the Secession in Scotland alone.

But a dark cloud was already lowering over the church. An intricate and irritating discussion had been introduced into the Synod respecting the religious clause of certain burgess-oaths which were required to be taken in some of the towns of Scotland. Some asserted that this oath could not be taken by any consistent Seceder; others insisted that it might, and that the question regarding it should be made matter of mutual forbearance.† The controversy

\* Letter of R. Erskine to Whitefield.—Frazer's *Life of E. Erskine*, p. 431.

† The clause ran in the following terms, and was contained in the oath imposed upon burgesses in the towns of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth:—'Here I protest before God and your Lordships, that I profess and allow with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof: I shall abide therein, and defend the same to my life's end; renouncing the Roman religion called Papistry.'

increased in bitterness, more especially when the interest was caught by the people, and in 1747, only fifteen years after the Secession, the contending parties who had so nobly stood side by side against the corruptions of the Establishment, were separated into two, and began to launch against each other mutual denunciation and invective. This was the memorable and mournful 'Breach' which marks the *second* great period in the history of the Secession. Alas! that any of its landmarks should also be the monument of its unhallowed wars!—We can imagine it to be the wish of some that this event in the history of the Secession should be wholly passed over or hidden in oblivion. But this, even were it practicable, would not be right. We may learn nearly as much from the errors of the church as from its excellencies; while no good can possibly be obtained from undistinguishing panegyric. Inspired wisdom does not withhold the information that 'the contention was sharp' between Paul and Barnabas, and that they departed asunder the one from the other, though it does not dilate upon the painful rupture, and it may be well, in reference to the present matter, to imitate both the fidelity and the brevity of the inspired example.

At the same time, while we should be faithful in recording and severe in condemning this painful occurrence, nothing can well be more injurious than an indiscriminating censure. Let it be admitted that, in the stormy contentions which ended in the breach, there was a mournful display of unhallowed human passion; still, a calm and unprejudiced onlooker might have marked throughout the contest on either side, the working of a sincere though imperfectly enlightened conscientiousness. It was not the squabble of opposing ecclesiastical factions for power or secular advantage, but the stern unyielding struggle of men who were haunted with a morbid dread of lowering or defacing the testimony which they had raised. The lesson which these good men now needed to learn was that which the present age of the church seems destined pre-eminently to develop,—that there are many points on which

men may conscientiously differ, and which ought to be left to each individual's personal conviction;—and the meaning of the burgess-oath was one of these. Luther, at the Reformation, forgot this principle, and his vehemence divided between the churches of Germany and Switzerland. The Fathers of the Secession forgot it, and hence a degree of unbending obstinacy, made stronger by their very conscientiousness, growing into alienation and fierce contention, and ending at once in the rupture of private friendships and of public bonds.

‘Each spake words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother.’

‘The Lord had divided them in his anger, and covered the daughter of Zion with a thick cloud, giving them also the wine of astonishment to drink.’ The breach is almost the only dark spot in the history of the Secession, and it is the only fact in its history of which many of its enemies and detractors seem to be aware.

The history of the Secession has now to be traced in two streams, according to the course taken by the two ecclesiastical bodies into which it was divided.\* But, as happened with Paul and Barnabas after their contention and separation, their alienation from each other did not disturb their fidelity to the great interests to which they were mutually consecrated and sworn. Each continued to rear high the Secession banner in all its integrity and amplitude; each continued to watch over the fidelity of the other, and by that over-ruling providence which so often educes good from seeming evil, the lessons and the liberties which the Secession provided were probably borne into a greater number of places by the two separated bands, than they would have been had they remained one. ‘Here is comfort,’ Ebenezer Erskine long before had said in one of his sermons,—‘Here is comfort in case of rents,

\* The party condemning the religious clause in the Burgess-oath was called the General Associate, and the other the Associate Synod. —In popular language, the former was better known as the Anti-burgher, and the other as the Burgher Synod.

divisions, and manifold disorders in the visible church, as there is at this day. . . . Here is comfort, that the great Manager of the house is looking on ; he permits and overrules all these confusions and disorders for his own holy and wise ends, for the trial of faith and patience, and to show his own skill in bringing order out of confusion ; and when he has performed his whole work in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he will reign among his ancients gloriously.\* And yet had the rulers in the Scottish Church been careful to improve the advantage which this division offered them, they might doubtless have recovered much of their lost influence and power. The unseemly wranglings which both preceded and followed the breach, must have greatly diminished for a time the moral power and attractiveness of the Secession ; and an honest repentance and timely concession at such a juncture, if it did not extinguish the Secession, must at least have checked its growth. But far different was the policy which the leaders in her councils showed themselves inclined to pursue. At the period of the breach they were advancing in their career of corruption and oppression, resolved to maintain their position not by the redress of the people's grievances, but by the suppression of their complaints and the extinction of their power ; and it does credit at once to the discrimination and to the conscientiousness of the Scottish people, that many of them preferred contention to corruption, especially where that contention, however unduly fierce, had its root in principle, and would rather have liberty with controversy than peace with bonds.

Indeed, during the fifteen years that had elapsed since the Secession, the rulers in the Scottish Church had advanced many steps nearer to the goal at which they had long been pointing, the complete extinction of the popular element in her constitution and policy, and the subjection of the people to an ecclesiastical oligarchy, themselves the willing tools and instruments of the State. The Willisons

\* Works, II. p. 349.

and others who, after the Secession, had continued to offer a feeble resistance to patronage, and had succeeded in obtaining an occasional concession, had ere this time passed from the scene, and men had inherited their office on whom their mantle of piety and charity had not descended.

Individual members of Presbytery whose consciences were aggrieved by violent settlements, were not even allowed the option of absence from the unhallowed proceedings, which still continued to be dignified with the name ordination; and in some instances where a minister refused to degrade himself, and violate his conscience by prostituting the solemn services of religion to the purposes of tyranny, he was summarily deposed from his sacred office for his so-called contumacy. It was in circumstances like these that the venerable Thomas Gillespie of Carnock, 'one of the most inoffensive and upright men of his time,' says Sir Henry Moncrieff, was driven from his charge,\* and, rejoicing that he was 'counted worthy to suffer shame for *His* name,' became, in the formation of the *Relief Presbytery*, the honoured founder of a second Secession.

It was not however till about the year 1763, when Dr. Patrick Cumin having withdrawn from the management, Principal Robertson became the leader of the Assembly, that the system of patronage reached its full maturity and shed its ripened fruits. It remained for this accomplished man, but most unscrupulous leader, to proclaim the principle, and even boldly act it out in the measures of the Assembly during a long course of years, that the call is not necessary to constitute a presentation valid, and that the presentation of the patron is in every case sufficient reason for the Presbytery's taking measures for the ordination of the presentee. A minority still insisted that the concurrence of the elders and heads of families should be regarded as essential, but even this party was small and diminishing, while the strictly popular party had by this become extinct.

It is easy to imagine the scenes with which the working

\* May 23, 1752.



out of such principles as these must have desolated Scotland, doing violence to some of the most cherished rights, and shocking some of the most sacred feelings of her people. For a time, protests were taken against the ordination of obnoxious presentees, and occasionally these were sustained by the inferior courts, but advocates and lawyers were there rife with precedents and bristling with quibbles,

‘like quills upon the fretted porcupine,’

and prepared in the name of the patron to carry the case by appeal to the bar of the Assembly, by whom it was sure to be confirmed. Such a process as this often occupied a series of years, during which the reclaiming parish was handed over to neglect, the worst passions permitted to spread, and the people taught by what they experienced to look upon the patron as a tyrant and the ministers of religion as his tools, too often alienated not only from the ecclesiastical system under which they had been trained, but from religion itself.

The proceedings connected with the ordination of the presentee, who was thus forced by ecclesiastical authority upon an oppressed and indignant people, often formed too consistent a close to the litigation and dictation of General Assemblies. The exasperated parishioners sometimes rose in a body to resist the induction of the presentee, and more than once succeeded in carrying away the members of Presbytery or the agents of the committee, as they were journeying to the place where a farce was to be enacted under forms of prayer. Troops of soldiers came in the course of time to be introduced into the parishes previously to an ordination; those who were to officiate on the occasion, as well as the presentee himself, were conducted to the spot under military escort, and an ordination became associated in the minds of thousands with the brandishing of sabres and the prancing of cavalry, far more than with the laying on of hands and prayer, or the exchange of mutual benediction. The scenes at Kirk of Shotts and Eaglesham, for example, form among the darkest pages



in the ecclesiastical history of the last century, and are such as the blindest partisan of the Scottish Church might well seek to bury in oblivion.

A system of such unchristian oppression and violence as this, rigorously pursued during a long course of years, must have operated with an influence the most unfavourable upon the religious condition of the Scottish Church, at once secularizing her spirit and deteriorating the character of her ministry. For, apart altogether from the exasperating and alienating effect upon the people of a forced settlement, and the impression so naturally left upon their minds, that the emoluments and immunities of the benefice were uppermost in the thoughts of their rulers, rather than the responsibilities of the ministerial office or the spiritual interests of the people, what must have been the character of the men who would submit to be so intruded, or consent to form a spiritual relation dependent for its success upon mutual affection and confidence, by means of aids and appliances from which every thing in Christianity and in Christian hearts instinctively recoils. It is when we thus look at patronage in its indirect as well as direct operation, not only wresting from the hands of the Christian people a Christian right, but opening up the way for the introduction into their pulpits of an unsound and secularized ministry, that we see the iniquitous system in its true character, and account for the stern and uncompromising opposition that was long raised against it by the best of the Scottish people.

That the system of patronage as administered in its fully developed spirit under the long reign of Principal Robertson, operated with the most vitiating and malign influence upon the character of her ministers, and through them upon the religious state of the people, is confessed by all who have looked into the ecclesiastical history of the period. Even the manly irony of Witherspoon in his 'Ecclesiastical Characteristics,' has not coloured the picture with too deep a shade. It was emphatically the dark age of the Scottish Church, when Moderatism sat on her icy throne and spread apathy

and numbness among the multitudes that owned her sway. 'A morality without godliness—a certain prettiness of sentiment, occasionally served up in tasteful and well turned periods, the ethics of philosophy or the academic chair, rather than the ethics of the gospel'\*—a ministry which might tickle the ear, but had no sting for the conscience or thrilling influence on the affections, and which was utterly powerless to heal the maladies of our moral nature—a ministry which after having solemnly assented to a Calvinistic creed, unblushingly taught Arminian, Pelagian, and Socinian errors, or as frequently withheld all positive statement of theological truth, and contented itself with soothing generalities—a ministry that not always maintaining an outward moral decorum, sought to commend itself by external polish rather than by the discharge of its high embassy, as the stern reprover of sin, the guide to salvation, and the healer of the broken-hearted; such a ministry now spread its deadening influence throughout the parishes of Scotland, and but for the light which was now shining on many corners of the land from other sources, would, in all likelihood, have succeeded at length in freezing the current of vital godliness, and extinguishing the lamp of evangelical truth. The notorious case of Dr. M'Gill of Ayr, demonstrates how far the leprosy of error had spread in the Assembly, towards the close of the last century, and how ready its rulers were to betray their most sacred trust. In an 'Essay on the Death of Christ,' published in 1780, he had represented our Lord as a mere man, denied the necessity and reality of his atonement, spoken of man's obedience as more precious and acceptable to God than the blood of Christ, and in short taught, either openly or covertly, the deadliest dogmas of Socinianism. Two years were permitted to elapse ere the Assembly could be induced to turn its attention to the heretical treatise: at length when the representations of some pious people constrained them to call

\* Description in Sermon by Dr. Chalmers, on occasion of the death of Dr. Andrew Thomson of St. George's Church, Edinburgh.

the author to account, he was dismissed with a censure so gentle as to have all the effect of acquittal; and when an attempt was made to revive the process a second time, the case was refused a hearing! It is when we thus contemplate the state of the Church of Scotland during the greater part of the last century, both in its betrayal of Christian truth, and of the rights of the Christian people, that we see the value of the Secession Church, as the faithful guardian of both.

Such had been the work of the Secession in both her branches, since the breach of 1747. Regarded with looks of high disdain from their lofty ramparts, by the leaders of the Assembly, and with many a confident prediction, uttered from the same quarter, of its speedy annihilation, the Secession continued steadily to advance in spite at once of their contempt and their prophecies. The friends of the Establishment even suffered themselves to be misled at times by appearances. In the progress of years the people having learned from experience the utter fruitlessness of opposition, ceased to protest against the admission of an obnoxious presentee, and this was sometimes hailed as an indication that the spirit of the people had spent its force, and was calming down into tame acquiescence. But the fond wish in such a case was father to the thought. The opposition had not ceased, it had only assumed another form,—a form less turbulent but more perilous; for the oppressed and insulted people beholding in the Secession a refuge at once from tyranny and error, quietly withdrew from the parish Church, often taking with them the majority of the parishioners, and leaving the forced incumbent to perform his mechanical service to almost empty walls. In this way did the Secession gradually spread itself over the land, and the Church of Scotland cease to be the Church of the people.

In no part of Scotland perhaps has its beneficial influence been more extensively felt or visibly displayed, than in the interesting group of the Orkney isles. The ministers of the Establishment in this remote region, away from inspection and influence, appear to have been peculiarly faithless

and inefficient, and the bleak and barren aspect of many of the islands formed but too faithful a type of the ignorance and spiritual barrenness of the people.

It was in the year 1795, that a Secession minister, in compliance with an invitation from a little band of Christians, crossed the stormy Pentland frith, and planted the standard of the Secession in Kirkwall, the small but ancient capital of the Orcadian isles. His ministry very soon awakened a general interest, and was rewarded with many conversions and the formation of a large and flourishing church. From this point the gospel 'sounded out' to the neighbouring islands, the Secession gradually growing in the confidence and affection of the people, until at length there was scarcely an island of any extent on some part of whose shores an humble meeting-house could not be described,—the token to the grateful islanders of privileges which the grace of God had taught them to prize. There is no home-mission of the last century more interesting than this, and none whose fruits have been more genuine or abundant. Its prayer-meetings are numbered by hundreds and their frequenters by thousands, while the liberality that has sometimes been manifested in the missionary cause has risen almost to a primeval standard. These Orcadian wastes have justly been styled the *Hephzibah* and the *Beulah* of the Secession Church.\*

Long before the attention of the Secession was particularly drawn to the Orkney islands, a profound interest had been taken by both branches, in Ireland and the American colonies. Indeed, the Secession standard had been raised in Ireland almost simultaneously with its rise in Scotland; while to different parts of America, such as Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Nova Scotia, so affectionate a regard was shown, that much of the time of Synods was spent in reading and considering the correspondence from those regions, and providing for the increased supply of their necessities; and scarcely a year elapsed in which one or more ministers

\* Eclectic Review. New Series, xii. p. 439.

might not be seen crossing the Atlantic, to swell the ranks and to aid in the evangelic labours of Presbyteries, that amid American prairies and by the banks of American rivers, were seeking to secure to the new world the highest blessings of the old.

While the two Synods were thus gradually extending themselves in Scotland, and not unmindful of the regions beyond, it would be foolish to imagine that an ecclesiastical body could pass through the larger portion of a century, without being at times perplexed by difficulties and agitated by storms. Such had been the occasional experience of the Secession in both its branches during the period of their separation. Few things indeed are more remarkable or pleasing than to mark with what vigilance they watched over the doctrinal purity of their denomination, and strove to 'hold fast the form of sound words.' Questions about matters of mere indifference, such as that which was raised in the *Smytonite* controversy,\* were indeed wisely and summarily dismissed by them, as things which both a regard for peace and inspired authority required them to avoid. But remembering that by their very historical position they were pre-eminently set for the defence of the truth, they displayed an almost sensitive fidelity whenever it was suspected that the leprous taint of error was among them, and never rested until they had put away the evil thing from the midst of them. Matters like these never seriously disturbed their peace, for in their zeal for the form of sound words they were cordial and unanimous.

But there was one question which, appearing in various forms and in connection with various circumstances, repeatedly engrossed the deliberations and threatened the peace of both Synods; the question, namely, regarding the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. Many

\* Mr. Smyton, minister of Kilmaurs, considered the lifting of the bread and the cup before the prayer at the Lord's supper, as an essential part of the ordinance, and insisted that those brethren whose practice differed from his own in this matter, should be authoritatively enjoined to adopt his method. The Synod wisely ruled that the question should be made one of mutual forbearance.



circumstances contributed to bring it into prominence before the Church courts. Their position as unendowed, naturally turned their thoughts with sensitive interest to the questions regarding magistratical authority in the Church, the well known chapter in the Westminster Confession, which in its obvious meaning assigns power to the magistrate in sacred things, and the growing scruples which individuals at licence and ordination felt in giving unqualified assent to this part of the Confession, kept it before their attention. The question even arose in another form. The covenanting periods of the Scottish Church had been looked back upon by the seceding Fathers as the brightest periods in the ecclesiastical annals of Scotland, and strong approbation expressed of the movements of that period; but suppose that approbation to be expressed in any thing like unqualified terms, would not the introduction of civil authority and temporal penalties into the region of conscience and religion, be thereby involved? This was the question which more than any other concentrated on it the attention of the assembled representatives and rulers of the Secession at this period. A distinguished living writer\* has well remarked, how incorrect and unphilosophical it is to fix upon some artificial epoch as marking the rise of some new sentiment in a community; but were we to venture a judgment in reference to the state of opinion on this question in the Secession Church, in what may be called the second period of her history, we should say that sound in feeling and practice she had not yet grasped and proclaimed the true theory on which that feeling and practice are based, and that the adoption and announcement of a fully developed principle was *more at least* the work of the third period than of the second. Individuals were clear and strong in their convictions, but the whole body was not leavened. The Seceders, indeed, from their founders downwards, never seem to have attached any great importance to secular emoluments, or to have

\* Isaac Taylor.—Spiritual Despotism.



been enamoured and entranced by the beautiful dream of a State church, such as their imagination pictured, or to have supposed that a church acquired any new glory by being endowed ; nay, in one of the ablest documents emitted from one of their sections at this period, they had already come to speak of the 'old rusty hoop' of an endowment ; but still it was no part of their work as founders rigorously to define the province of the magistrate, and to declare his utter exclusion from all control in ecclesiastical affairs. The true principle had indeed been announced by Adam Gib in the first period, but it was not yet seen in all its results, the process was being wrought out in the second period, it was to be perfected in the third. That we are right in the statement that the Seceders had already arrived at the proper practical position on this important question, appears from the circumstance of their introducing into the formula of ordination a qualifying sentence, in which it is declared that the candidate, while acknowledging the Westminster Confession of Faith to be the confession of his faith, is not to be understood as approving of any thing in those books which teaches, or may be supposed to teach, compulsory or persecuting doctrines in religion. While on the other hand, that they had not yet reached the solid ground on which all interference or compulsion in matters of religion may be consistently condemned, appears from the language of some of their declarations, in which they still cling to the idea of a *via media*, and, while eschewing all coercive measures, admit that the magistrate might within certain limits exercise a legitimate and salutary control in ecclesiastical affairs. The great problem, in short, was now being wrought out, every new discussion was throwing new light on the subject, and in a little longer the result would be proclaimed, and theory and practice seen to harmonise. The discussions which agitated the Secession on this subject are well known to have been the occasion of throwing off from both Synods a few ministers and congregations, that clung to high notions of magistratical authority in the church. Each of these became

the nucleus of a distinct religious denomination, the one assuming the name of the 'Constitutional Associate Presbytery,' and the other that of the 'Original Burgher Presbytery.' In common speech they are better known as the 'Old Light Antiburghers' and the 'Old Light Burghers.' Though the former of these has contained in it some names of high and merited literary celebrity, neither has ever attracted much popular interest or sympathy. They were looking backward, while the world was advancing. They had moored their vessel to a harbour from which the tide was ebbing never to return.

More than seventy years must now be supposed to have elapsed since the mournful division took place in the ranks of the Secession. During this long period the two bodies had gradually been spreading themselves over the land, occasionally indeed crossing each other's path, but far more frequently occupying a distinct position. The original actors in the breach had long since passed from the earth, and in the world of unclouded light seen eye to eye. The angry feelings and prejudices that had been connected with the breach had gradually subsided, and after the lapse of two generations, had almost entirely faded away. Now and then a hostile javelin yet passed between them,—but it was feebly thrown, and the feuds, no longer sustained by popular sympathy, refused to be revived. Intercourse among the ministers and elders of the two Synods in the healing atmosphere of Bible and Missionary Societies, drew out mutual esteem and dispelled all lingering prejudice. Intercourse among the people in religious meetings, and in the common action to which those meetings led, produced the same salutary feelings. The cry for union was raised from one quarter and responded to from all. Petitions and representations covered the tables of both Synods and elicited a most cordial consent. The preliminaries of union were peacefully arranged. And on the 8th of September 1820, in Bristo Street meeting-house, Edinburgh, the place where seventy-three years before the breach had occurred, the two Synods, amid the solem-

nities of devotion, and in the presence of an immense concourse of people that wept for joy, were again united, and became one rod in the hand of the Lord.

In 1747 when they had separated, the number of congregations belonging to the Secession were thirty-two; at the period of this auspicious consummation they had increased to two hundred and sixty-two. Though separated for so long a period no truth had been abandoned by either party, and now rearing a common standard, receiving from heaven a double blessing, and breathing a new spirit as the effect of their union, the united body entered upon the *third* and most prosperous period of its history.

This period comes into too close contact with the present hour, either to require or to warrant more than the most cursory detail. Its chief actors are still in the midst of us, its impressions are still vivid upon our minds. History demands perspective. The mellowing power of distance is necessary to the discerning of proportions and to the due appreciation of events. But were we called upon to mark the more prominent features of this period of the Secession-history, which beginning with one union and ending with another has closed upon us but yesterday, we should point especially to three,—the rapid increase of its churches in Scotland, the remarkable development of the missionary spirit among its people and the consequent spread of its missions, and the more aggressive attitude assumed by it towards the Established Church, as the result of the almost universal adoption by its ministers and people of what has commonly been termed the Voluntary principle.

In no previous period of its history had its congregations increased on so rapid a scale. Its numbers gave it confidence; its union increased its moral power, and, in every succeeding year, places of worship, reared by the spontaneous liberality of its people, were rising in the various corners of the land, so that in less than thirty years, more than a hundred new congregations have added strength and power to the united body.

The growth of the missionary spirit during the same period has been still more remarkable. This spirit indeed was not new in the Secession, as past statements have shown, but hitherto it had wanted organization, concentration, and development, and it is the glory of this epoch that these qualities were now given to it, and that the Secession began to assume its proper position in the front rank of missionary churches. No longer satisfied with sending out an occasional missionary, or forwarding an occasional contribution to destitute regions, or allowing the liberality of its people to find its way, as it might, into the treasury of some general society, it was determined to adopt a mission of its own, which should gather round it the interest and enlist the prayers of the people, and continue extending in proportion as the liberality of the people enlarged. And the grain of mustard-seed has become a tree. Canada was first selected as an appropriate sphere of operation, then Jamaica and Trinidad, and then, as the first step into the interior of Africa, the shores of Old Calabar. Timid men trembled and doubted as each new scene was measured out, but the growing and steady munificence of the people each time rebuked and dispelled their fears. The missionary spirit was seen rising every year to a higher figure; sometimes in one year the funds increased by thousands. Individual congregations in several instances undertook the entire support of individual missionaries. More recently mission-premises were erected and office-bearers chosen, who should give themselves wholly to the oversight and control of missionary operations, and in 1847 the Secession-church was found to be supporting a staff of more than sixty missionaries. So quick and steady a development of the missionary spirit in the Secession church is one of the noblest features in its later history.

Contemporaneously with these efforts to extend the church in foreign regions, was the spread of opinions on the subject of civil establishments of religion that placed her in a somewhat new attitude towards the Scottish

church. Hitherto the attention of Seceders had been more turned to the corruptions of the Established Church, now the conviction began to seize hold of multitudes that the very principle on which an established church is based is essentially unsound and sinful, and that corruption and bondage, instead of being accidental to such a relation, necessarily flow from such an unhallowed union. So long as the Seceders formed but a small minority in the land these sentiments were not so apt to occur to their minds; but when once they found themselves a numerous and enlarging body, they could scarcely fail to have their eyes opened sooner or later to the injustice and anomaly of an established creed and an endowed ministry. Moreover, the suspicion that an early attempt would be made to endow the Roman Catholic priesthood, led thousands to canvass anew the general question of ecclesiastical endowments.

Pamphlets, written with great ability, condemning the very principle of State churches as unscriptural, unjust, and injurious, were thrown abroad upon the public mind, and found it to a great extent prepared. For the civil magistrate to establish one form of religion, it was said, is to intrude into the sacred domain of conscience, and, appearing as a dictator where he should only appear as a disciple, to violate its rights. To endow a form of religion professed by a certain number of his subjects, is to inflict political injustice on the rest, by making them contribute to the support of a system of which they conscientiously disapprove, and by creating invidious distinctions among subjects who are equally dutiful and loyal, to sow the seeds of discontent and disorder. Moreover, there is no authority in the Christian code for ecclesiastical establishments; on the contrary, its divine Author has laid down a law, which imposes upon the members of the church the duty of sustaining its temporalities,—a law which, among Christians, has proved itself not only sufficient for self-support but for self-extension. And was it to be supposed that the State would confer this special boon upon the church without receiving corresponding concessions? Endowment was the



price of submission; and the only security for a church continuing permanently free was in being self-sustained. These appeals to justice, to sound policy, to the word of God, found a response in the bosoms of thousands. The ministers and members of the Secession Church were all but unanimous in adherence to them; they assumed, in consequence, a more aggressive attitude towards the Established Church than ever, not only exposing her corruptions, but assailing her constitution, from which those corruptions were declared to spring, and insisting that as the only means of her reformation and independence, the golden shackles which bound her to the state should be dissevered. Among the writings which powerfully contributed to awaken and extend the agitation, we cheerfully make especial mention of those by Dr. Marshall of Kirkintilloch.

The Seceders have been reproached for having abandoned the ground occupied by their Founders and Fathers on this long agitated question, and epithets have been applied to them in connection with it, which those who used them would now be the readiest to recall. It cannot be denied that on this point they are in advance of their founders, though perhaps the more correct statement of the case would be, that they have become more consistent, and connected a sound practice with a principle that will sustain and guide it. Is this to be blamed? Or can any idea be more monstrous or unprotestant than that which would fix upon any past era of the church as the perfect model for the future, any deviation from which is apostasy? Did Calvin betray and belie the principles of the Reformation, because he went further than Luther? Was it not the very announcement of the Seceders from the beginning that they lay open to light, and that they were called to carry on the Reformation-work to higher stages of perfection as Providence should open up their way? Has not every great era of the church been distinguished for the development of some new principle? How preposterous indeed to imagine that a church should pass through a century of discussions and events with the word



of God in her hand, and not on some subject or other obtain a clearer understanding or reach a more solid ground! And having obtained a clearer understanding and a more solid ground, did not honesty and true consistency as well as magnanimity demand that they should openly avow the change?

The friends of the Established Church regarded this movement for a time with dignified silence, hoping that the storm would spend itself, and then pass away. This may happen with mere passion, but not with the deep convictions of Christian men. The storm grew wilder, and as these convictions were favourably discussed in many public journals, expounded in enthusiastic public meetings, and even began to be echoed in parliament, it filled the minds of churchmen with dismay. Defences came forth from the adherents of Established churches, and the whole land resounded with the Voluntary controversy.

But the defence of the Established Church was not confined to mere discussion. Measures were at the same time had recourse to, with the view at once of weakening the strength of evangelical Dissenters, and by imposing certain restraints upon the exercise of patronage, of popularizing the Establishment, and demonstrating, in contradiction to the charges of Dissenters, their independence, in all strictly ecclesiastical matters, of State control. A party had before this time arisen in the church, evangelical in sentiment,—earnest in feeling,—warm in their attachment to the national church,—though by no means at this period friendly to popular election, in the full extent of that privilege, disposed to recognise, in some form or other, the voice of the people in the appointment of ministers,—and strong in their conviction and assertion of the independent jurisdiction of the church in its ecclesiastical affairs. It was by them that the two measures we have referred to were introduced before the Assembly, and carried.

The former of these was a scheme of Church-extension, in which it was proposed to raise funds for the building of places of worship in connexion with the Establishment,

that should provide accommodation, not merely for the adherents of the Established Church, but for the entire population of Scotland, and having reared the chapels, to apply to the government for endowments. In this way the labours of hundreds of Dissenting ministers were overlooked, the accommodation which they provided disregarded, and the conscientious attachments of thousands of the Dissenting people, imagined to be capable of being undermined by the offer of free accommodation, set at nought, while injury was proposed to be added to insult by endowing those churches out of the national funds. Higher and purer motives were doubtless at work in the advocacy and arrangement of this scheme, but the design was avowed to weaken the strength of the Dissenters. They were to be undersold in the market of church-accommodation by funds which they themselves were to be compelled to supply. The indignation of the Seceders and other dissenting bodies was roused against a scheme which sought their ruin, while it branded them with contempt, and a stern and energetic opposition was organized against it, and continued until it gained its object. The chapels arose, but the endowments were withheld; the scheme failed in its hostile objects, and the property itself eventually passed from the hands of the party that had reared it. The whole history of this measure demonstrates the false position in which an established church stands towards those which are unendowed, and how far even good men may be carried when they are seized upon by the spirit of factious domination.

The second measure was the Veto Act, in which the General Assembly declared the concurrence of the people to be essential to the validity of a presentation, and conferred on the people the power of a negative on the patron's appointment. It was an imperfect boon, since all that the people obtained by it was the right of rejection and not the right of choice; but still it was sufficient to bring the church into collision with the civil courts, and to test the assertion of ecclesiastical independence, which the popular party had so often and confidently advanced. Instances

soon occurred in which the people exercised their newly acquired power, and vetoed the individual whom the patron had nominated—presbyteries sustained the act of the people, and refused to admit the presentee to trials—and patron and presentee alike complained of the invasion of their civil rights, and carried their complaint before the civil courts. The Court of Session decided in behalf of the patron, and found that the Assembly, in passing the Veto Act, had exceeded its powers. The question was appealed to the House of Lords, by whom the decision was confirmed. Government was then applied to in the emergency, and asked to pass an act similar in its provisions to the Veto, but it refused the boon. And then was seen the sublime spectacle of hundreds of ministers walking forth from an Establishment which they now found to be enslaved, abandoning valuable emoluments and immunities for the sake of liberty and independence, and, in the formation of the Free Church, becoming the founders of a third Secession.

It was amid the controversies and struggles which we have just described, that a friendly spirit was being formed and fostered between the Secession and Relief churches, which in a few years was to terminate in another union. Similar in their origin, and not unlike in their history, beholding the Established Church from the same standing point, it was not to be wondered at, that when the Voluntary controversy arose, the two bodies should be found thinking alike on this question, and launching their mutual protestations both against the corruptions of the Established Church and against the system from which those corruptions rose. The church-extension scheme, which was aimed alike at the prosperity of both denominations, had led the two bodies to combined deliberation and concerted action, and increasing their knowledge of each other, had increased their mutual esteem. The thought of union began to be mooted and freely canvassed in both denominations. Overtures began to be laid upon the tables of both Synods, praying for more regular and friendly intercourse between the two, and pointing to union as the de-

sired result. These overtures were favourably entertained, friendly deputations passed from each Synod to the other at their annual meetings, and committees of the two Synods met together in the interval, for the frank interchange of opinion and sentiment, and paving the way to the desired consummation. Still the people, in either body, were not prepared. No formal opposition, indeed, was raised against union, but there was still a deficiency of positive interest and desire, and both Synods, aware that increased knowledge of each other would make the desire for union more earnest and universal, and that even a measure good in itself might be entered on prematurely, wisely delayed, feeling that the desired event must be the fruit of conviction and not of stimulants, and stand more intimately connected with the closet even than with the platform or the church-court.

While movements were thus steadily tending to union, the controversy regarding the extent of the Atonement arose in the Secession, and for a time turned its thoughts away from union with other bodies, to the preservation of its own integrity. The ordeal was severe, sifting, consolidating, purifying. Casting off from itself men of extreme sentiments, it came forth occupying the same middle ground on the great question which had agitated it, which the Erskines had occupied and their descendants held fast. And while ungenerous aspersions had been cast on their doctrinal purity by certain parties during the protracted discussions, the Relief came forward honourably to declare their undisturbed and undiminished confidence.

The desire for union now became stronger than ever. In the conferences between the committees of the two bodies, the most perfect agreement was discovered on every point essential to an honest and immediate incorporation. Agreed as to the rule of faith and obedience, the word of God,—agreed as to the symbol or confession of their faith, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, which both bodies received with the same modifications,—agreed as to the ordinances of the Christian church and the mode of

their observance,—agreed as to the form of church government, the terms of communion, and entire independence of the secular power,—similar in their historic origin, in their denominational mission, in their denominational sympathies,—they could unite without compromise, without renunciation or concealment of conscientious conviction. The question with thousands no longer was, is it possible to unite? but, would it not be sinful to remain separate? The state of Scotland, the condition of the heathen world, the reproach of past divisions, the glory of Christ, every thing sacred and solemn, called them to become one; while the spirit generated and the healthy impulse given by the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, no doubt contributed to hasten the result.

And the union at length came, the fruit now of ripened conviction and unanimous desire. It is not our province to describe the arrangements and formalities which preceded and prepared for it.\* The 13th of May, 1847, was the day agreed upon by the two Synods, and Tanfield Hall, Edinburgh, a scene already rendered memorable by another sublime event, was the place chosen for this auspicious union. The Synods proceeded about mid-day from their usual place of meeting to the appointed scene. Hundreds of people had come from other parts of Scotland to witness the event; and many of these, along with thousands of the inhabitants of Edinburgh, lined the streets on the way to Tanfield. On the arrival of the two Synods, the spacious hall was found crowded with an immense assemblage, deeply interested and solemnized. The members of the two courts took their position in a reserved space in the middle of the hall, and were arranged in alternate benches, so as to be mingled with one another. The proceedings were begun with the singing of psalms and prayer. The Clerks read the minute of their respective Synods agreeing to union; the Moderators of the two Synods then giv-

\* We invite the reader for abundant details to 'Narrative of the Origin, Progress, and Consummation of the Union,' by Dr. Mackelvie.



ing to each other the right hand of fellowship, declared the union formed. Their example was followed by the ministers and elders; the immense audience, catching the spirit of the scene, exchanged the same tokens of Christian regard; the countenances of some were beaming with hope, some were melted into tears, but all were grateful and glad; and the two churches, merging their denominational name, but not their denominational mission, became one, under the designation of the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

It was one of those happy thoughts which are given in answer to prayer, that led the United Church to introduce into the basis of Union, its eighth, and its concluding articles. What a noble pledge is given in the eighth article, we trust to be fitly redeemed in great enterprises that shall awake whole nations to life:—

‘That this church solemnly recognises the obligation to hold forth, as well as to hold fast, the doctrine and laws of Christ; and to make exertions for the universal diffusion of the blessings of his gospel at home and abroad.’\*

And to our mind there is moral sublimity in the closing paragraph, in which, at the very moment when the church has spread to the breeze her new denominational banner, she makes this her very occasion for recognising and proclaiming the universal brotherhood of the saints:—

‘And, in fine, the United Church regard with a feeling of brotherhood all the faithful followers of Christ, and shall endeavour to maintain the unity of the whole body of Christ, by a readiness to co-operate with all its members in all things in which they are agreed.’ ‘Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.’

It was just a hundred years from the ‘Breach’ that the union of the Secession with the Relief was consummated, and a hundred and fifteen years from the time when the four seceding Fathers held their first meeting at Gairney



Bridge. At the moment of their union with the Relief in 1847, the number of her ministers had increased from four to 402, and the united body numbered in all 518 ministers.

It seems a question very natural at the conclusion of such a sketch as we have attempted,—*how far has the Secession discharged the high trusts committed to her, and wrought out the ends for which she appears to have been called into separate existence?*

1. Looking at the Secession Church, then, in its most important aspect, as commissioned to preserve the gospel to Scotland, when there was imminent danger that without some such separate organization and formal testimony, it would have been ‘wormed out of the land,’ the admission we anticipate will be unanimous that she has been faithful to her trust. She has had her faults, her seasons of formality, her unseemly wranglings, her unhappy breach, but in this first and highest element of her commission she stands unimpeached and unimpeachable. The same gospel for which the Marrowmen struggled, and with which the Erskines and their noble associates thrilled the thousands that hung on their lips at their high sacramental solemnities, and which they hastened to write on their Secession-banner in their ‘Act concerning the doctrine of Grace,’ is at this hour preached from the pulpits of their descendants; nor is it possible to point to a period during all the hundred and fifteen years of her separate history, in which she has bedimmed the holy light which it was given her to watch, or her trumpet emitted an uncertain sound. The doctrinal terminology may have varied, but the doctrine has remained the same; and though some have been ready to suspect in the variation of phrases a lapsing from the truth, inquiry has ever served to dispel the over-jealous fears. Variety of phrase may spring from freedom of thought, as well as from change of sentiment, and we must beware of attaching the same value to the frame, as to the picture which it helps to preserve and enshrine. It is a fact on which though her children may not dwell with boasting, they ought to dwell with gratitude, that the

Secession from 1732 till now, has not only in her confessions but in her living ministrations held forth the word of life, and that the hands that have held it forth—often in the midst of opposition, and obloquy, intolerance, and contempt—have never once been polluted by a bribe.

The real importance of this fact is never seen by us until we realize the condition of the Church of Scotland contemporaneously with the rise and infant struggles of the Secession. The friends of the gospel at that period within the Established Church, were few and diminishing, and almost became extinct when the Willisons and others passed from the scene. Had the Erskines remained in the Establishment, their testimony would in all likelihood have perished with themselves, and the lamp of evangelical light gone out in Scotland. It is only when we imagine what the religious condition of Scotland would in all likelihood have soon become had there been no Secession, and the tendencies of the Scottish Church in the downward path to error and indifference remained unchecked, that we duly appreciate the course taken by the seceding Fathers. Even in spite of their secession indeed, the course of the Church of Scotland for a long period was retrograde, but with the rise of the Secession the people no longer depended upon the Church of Scotland exclusively for instruction, and our land owes it to her above all others that when the doctrines of grace were unfashionable, and their preachers regarded with contempt by the literary potentates of the age, her ministers maintained an unchanging fidelity to evangelic truth, and were instrumental in no small degree in at length arousing the dormant energies of the Established clergy, and awakening in their ranks the almost forgotten sounds of an evangelic and life-giving ministry.

2. *As regards the high interests of religious liberty*, it is difficult to over-estimate the important position that the Secession Church has occupied in Scotland. Her founders came out from the Established Church that they might preserve one of the most important Christian rights, and both they and their descendants have been true to their

pledge. Indeed the noble contendings of her Fathers against patronage, leading them to the study of the constitution of the Church, made them assume a firmer and more consistent ground. They insisted on the right of popular election in its full and scriptural extent,—that every member of the congregation, of whatever sex or social status, should enjoy the right of choice. The more they thought and wrote on this matter, they saw that any modification must be arbitrary, and that if the right was modified, it might eventually be withdrawn. The people of the Secession have uniformly shown themselves most jealous for the enjoyment of this right in all its integrity, and her Presbyteries have as uniformly and cheerfully assented to its uncontrolled exercise.

The good effects of this have been various. Called upon in this way to perform a most important duty, the people have been trained to interest themselves in their own affairs, and in attending to their own interests have acquired that habit of exercising individual judgment, which stands closely connected with the continuance of ecclesiastical and civil liberty. Our churches have thus been normal schools of Christian freedom, and in some measure realized the model described by a living historian, 'each church a little democracy—the re-union of these a confederation.'\* In the preservation of this privilege, moreover, they have felt from the first that there was involved the preservation of another more momentous still. Patronage brought with it another evil worse than itself. It was the most effective instrument of placing a hireling ministry in the pulpits of Scotland, and of gradually wresting from the people the bread of life. Had it not been for the Secession, it would have accomplished this. And therefore in contending for the right of popular election and preserving it, the first Seceders were not merely insisting on the possession of a barren right, but contending for what they knew to be one of their surest bul-

\* Luther and Calvin, by J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, D.D.

warks against deadly error, and a secularized ministry. It is true that in later times patronage has sometimes been the means of introducing an evangelical minister into a parish, it ought to be remembered however that the existence of evangelical and unendowed bodies has placed the patron in a new position, and that the fear of driving away the people from the Establishment by an obnoxious presentation, has very often been the true secret of such appointments. What the patron has *sometimes* done in such cases, the people would *uniformly* have done had they been left to themselves.

It would be difficult to estimate how far the Secession has been the instrument of impregnating other religious parties with sound principles on the subject of popular rights. When a church is historically associated with some great principle, as the Secession has been, it becomes the public teacher of that principle, and is continually holding up by its very position a protest against the opposite abuse, and keeping the disputed matter before the public mind. The very resistance offered to it is often a confession of uneasy convictions and conscious weakness. How far the first Secession may thus stand connected with subsequent secessions it is impossible to say. We know that the seed of truth must have time to germinate; and that the principles announced in one age have often become the springs of action in the next.

Nor is this the only matter connected with the rights and liberties of the people, in behalf of which the Secession has exerted a powerful and beneficial influence. We have already had occasion in the body of our sketch to notice her position on the great question of the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. Her very origin led her from the first to feel and act aright on this point. One of the first things done by the Fathers after their Secession was to resist an injunction of the government requiring them to read from their pulpits the infamous Porteous act. One of the first public documents emitted by them declared the province of the civil magistrate to be confined

to civil matters. As their history advanced, their tone and attitude became more decided, even when they failed to announce the fully developed principle, and exception was taken against every sentiment in the Westminster Confession that taught, or might be supposed to teach, compulsory doctrines in matters of religion. Their position as unendowed made them feel that their safety as a denomination depended on the minds of the people being occupied with enlightened sentiments on the rights of conscience, and the institutions of the country being pervaded and animated by them. The consequence is, that on every question in which the rights of conscience are involved, the tone of her people is expected to be decided and unanimous. It is long since they, in common with the other dissenters of the land, have been looked to as constituted by their ecclesiastical relation and history the hereditary guardians of Christian liberty.

3. In estimating the influence exerted by a religious denomination on a country, it is necessary to enquire *what have been the character and amount of its contributions to the literature of that country?* In the living voice of an educated ministry, the Secession has from the first held no secondary place in forming and purifying the general mind. But in what degree have its ministers given writings to the church which have taken rank among its standard and popular literature, and promise to exert a permanent influence on the Scottish mind? When we remember that her ministers have from the first been a working clergy,—in addition to the labours that stand more immediately connected with the pulpit, giving much of their time to the private duties of the pastorate, it is surprising how many honoured names in the roll of her pastors stand among the contributors to the Christian literature of the land, and have received the unequivocal stamp of public approbation. ‘Sacrifice to heroes,’ it has been finely said, ‘is reserved until after sunset;’\* on this

\* Hamilton of Leeds.



principle we abstain from naming living authors, and in such a sketch as this, must even confine our reference to the more prominent of those, who by their works have shown themselves the benefactors of the church, and shed honour on the religious denomination to which they belong.

We mention first of all the sermons of the *two Erskines*, *Ebenezer and Ralph*, as having contributed in no small degree to enrich the popular theology of Scotland. No doubt these works derive an extrinsic interest from the fact of their having been produced by men, who were the founders of a new religious denomination, and also from their having been thrown upon the Scottish mind, at a period when they served as a most efficient antidote to doctrinal error and religious indifference. But even when these accidental circumstances are forgotten, they possess an intrinsic value, which accounts for the fact that they are still extensively popular after the lapse of a century, in which many an able volume has passed into oblivion; and that at the bookstalls of Holland at the present hour, few religious writings are more frequently enquired for by the Dutch peasant than the works of '*Erskyna*.' We know not where we shall find in the popular theology of Scotland, except in the writings of Boston of Ettrick, any sermons that contain a richer vein of evangelical truth, presented not in the dry forms of scholastic dogmatism, but with all the energy of earnest men and ambassadors of Christ. Modern fastidiousness may accuse them of prolixity, and their numerous subdivisions may contrast unfavourably with the smoother flow of modern eloquence, but they are full of those life-giving words which have been found in all ages to exert a mysterious power over the heart of man. In one excellence they are pre-eminent, and, except in some parts of Bunyan, are unsurpassed even in our rich puritan theology. We refer to the thrilling appeals to sinners, which in the close of many of their sermons extend from page to page, and seem instinct with the very spirit of him who wept over Jerusalem. The power of such passages even when read is sometimes won-



derful, and when preached to listening thousands on a mountain-side by men who passed from their closet to their pulpit, and with all the accompaniments of impassioned action, must have told upon their hearers with amazing power.—We have already had opportunity in an earlier part of this sketch to refer to the works of the other Secession Fathers.

No name throws a greater lustre over the early literature of the Secession than that of *Michael Bruce* the poet. Struggling with all the disadvantages of poverty and infirm health, borne down by the hard and ill-requited toils of a village schoolmaster, and dying at the early age of twenty-one, he has yet left behind him in his 'Lochleven,' and especially in his Odes to Spring and to the Cuckoo,\* writings of high poetic excellence. The exquisite finish of these two last-named pieces is such, that no word could be changed without injury to the whole, while their beautiful sentiment, their tender sadness and fitful turns of thought, remind us of the Æolian harp swept by the soft breezes of spring, and emitting sounds ever changing, ever beautiful, and ever sad. It needed not Lord Craig's touching picture of the pale youth looking through the sashed window fringed with honeysuckle which his own hands had trained, or his own premonition of the

'Churchyard's lonely mound,  
Where melancholy with still silence reigns,  
And the rank grass waves o'er the cheerless ground,'

to make us return to the perusal of such verses again and again. Edmund Burke pronounced his Ode to the Cuckoo to be the most beautiful lyric in the English language; it is a stronger proof of the poetic merit both of it and of his Ode to Spring, that many of their lines have become as household words, a part of the current coin of

\* We here assume that the 'Ode to the Cuckoo' is the genuine production of Michael Bruce and not of Logan. We feel that we may safely and confidently do this, after the conclusive statements of Dr. Mackelvie in his interesting memoir of Bruce.

literature and of refined conversation which thousands quote, without knowing the golden mine from which they were originally brought.

We pass the names of *Adam Gib*, the vigorous thinker and sturdy polemic, with whom few dared to measure arms, and those of the *Swanstons*, elder and younger, each distinguished as the author of an excellent volume of sermons, to mention one who has gathered around him a wide and sustained reputation, *John Brown of Haddington*. Though called to struggle with unusual difficulties in youth, and only coming under a systematic education at an age when Scottish students are generally passing into official life, he acquired such an extensive learning and by such rapid steps, that the superstitious and illiberal spirit of some actually hinted the suspicion that he owed his remarkable advancement to Satanic aids. It was a beautiful reply of Ralph Erskine to such absurd and narrow fancies, 'I think the lad has a sweet savour of Christ about him.' With astonishing powers of mental application, a memory that lost nothing which it ever received, and uncommon habits of arrangement, he combined a deep piety, which seemed to give him a new faculty by imparting to all his powers a double impulse, and rendered him one of the most valuable contributors to the theological literature of his age. His Bible Dictionary is a rich storehouse of solid learning, with none of that trashy speculation which has become fashionable, and helps to display the author more than to illustrate his theme. Many subjects discussed in the Dictionary have no doubt been more perfectly elucidated since, but it resembles the first invention on which others have only improved; while his 'Self-Interpreting Bible,' rich in devout reflection, and in those happy meanings which are often suggested to piety when they are withheld from learning, has become the property of the general church, and in the pious households of the land rests on the same shelf with the 'Pilgrim's Progress' and the 'Fourfold State.'

*William Macewen*, the author of the well-known and

popular work on the types, claims a passing notice. A rigid learning may perhaps charge him at times with too ingenious analogies, and even with making persons and institutions typical for which there is no inspired authority; but his warm imagination and glowing style have accomplished for this interesting department of revelation, what the more tame and homely mental qualities could not have achieved. He has thrown a lustre and beauty around many Jewish rites and institutions, exhibited their majesty, consistency, and unity, illuminated some of the least understood parts of the Old Testament revelation, and made the mild beams of Calvary shine into some of the darkest recesses of the Jewish temple.

Succeeding the venerable Brown of Haddington in the theological chair of his denomination, and resembling him in more than one of his mental characteristics, we know of no name in the Secession that is mentioned with more of that tender respect which has been rendered sacred by affection than that of *Dr. Lawson of Selkirk*. With a simplicity of manners truly child-like, he united a learning that might have given renown to half a bench of bishops. His extraordinary powers of memory even throw those of Sir James Mackintosh into the shade, for it has been confidently asserted that had the Scriptures in the tongues in which they were originally written, by some strange event, perished from the earth, the inestimable treasure could have been restored to the world from the memory of Dr Lawson alone. It is an unquestionable fact that having gone from Selkirk to Haddington on one occasion to teach the students, and forgotten to carry with him his Hebrew Bible, he conducted his examinations from memory alone, and detected with promptitude and accuracy the minutest blunder of his pupils in the reading of the text. On more than one question connected with religious liberty, he was in advance of his age, and by some of the pamphlets which he gave to the world on these subjects, did much to liberalize the feelings of his contemporaries, while his mild temper and ingenuousness found a way into the

minds of many for unpalatable truths. As an expositor of scripture, Dr. Lawson has given to the world several volumes of sterling excellence. He seems to have chosen the by-paths and less frequented regions of the sacred volume in which to search for hidden treasure. His lectures on Joseph, Ruth, Esther, and the Book of Proverbs, are marked by the same characteristics,—learning substantial but unobtrusive, solid thoughts that would oftener appear profound were they not so pellucid, and did they not seem to flow from his mind with such perfect ease, massive good sense, and a gentle charity shining from his own heart and casting its mild radiance on every page.

*Archibald Hall* of London, in his elaborate treatise on ‘Gospel-worship,’ and in his work on ‘Faith and the influence of the Gospel,’ has given evidence of a masculine understanding richly stored with theology, and in the latter work has done much to disentangle an important subject from artificial distinctions that had only served to complicate and mystify what they professed to explain; while in common with the venerable *Dr. Jerment*, he contributed by the excellence of his regular ministrations to draw honour around the cause of the Secession in London.

But the name among Secession authors which, beyond all others, is best known in purely literary circles, is that of *Dr. Jamieson*. He has acquired a more than European reputation. Not that his theological writings alone could have accomplished this result, though his ‘Uses of Sacred History’ abounds in valuable matter; his answer to Priestley is a masterly vindication of one of the main pillars of revealed truth, produced at a time when there were giants in the field; his history of the Culdees is a work of fine research and curious disclosure, carrying the lights of history through Cimmerian gloom into the earlier era of a simpler worship and a purer faith, and adding a new page to the ecclesiastical literature of Scotland. It is his Dictionary of the Scottish language that is his great work—the pedestal of his fame. When we consider the laborious research, the philosophical discrimination, the knowledge of national

customs and modes of thought, the perception of nice shades of meaning and unexpected affinities, which were displayed in the production of this work, we shall not be surprised that it was looked upon as one of the literary wonders of the age that produced it, or think the opinion which was long since expressed too extravagant, that it was not only sufficient to put honour on a denomination but on a kingdom.

Perhaps no writer that has arisen in the Secession has more enriched the age with valuable works of a devotional and practical character than *Dr. Belfrage of Falkirk*. His numerous volumes are elegant vessels filled to the brim with the honey of evangelical sentiment. The vein in which above all others he excels is that of tenderness, and we do not wonder that in treating on congenial themes, especially at communion-seasons, his whole congregation was often melted into tears. There was a certain luxury in such sacred sorrow. His sacramental addresses abound in beautiful applications of historical passages of Scripture to the purposes of devout meditation.

In this connection let us also name as most useful writers and saintly men, *John Brown of Whitburn*, and *Samuel Gillan of Comrie*.

We shall not be restrained from mentioning in these notices of eminent writers whom the Secession has produced, the names of Professor Bruce of Whitburn, Professor Paxton and Dr. M'Crie of Edinburgh, though they became connected eventually with one of those smaller sections of Seceders to whose origin we have already referred.

*Professor Bruce* was remarkable at once for the strength and the versatility of his mental powers. In learned research, in theological discussion, in popular essay, in parody and satire, and even in poetry he appeared as an author, and in almost all of them excelled. It is to be lamented that his excellent and varied gifts were too much given to themes of temporary interest, and that the very versatility of his talents was unfavourable to his concentrating his energies upon some great work worthy of himself.



*Professor Paxton* has left behind in his 'Illustrations of Scripture,' a standard work, in which the fruits of much research are presented in a form at once popular, elegant and instructive.

*Dr. M'Crie* stands in the foremost rank not merely of Secession authors, but of ecclesiastical historians. No writer of history ever prepared himself for his task by a more conscientious and untiring research, passing from the beaten path of earlier historians into strange bye-roads of inquiry, and gathering rich material from rare pamphlet, dim manuscript and dusty tome. The great novelist in his hands was shown to be a mere surface-historian, a mere student of costume and form, and even some historians were shown to have been little more than novelists. We believe it to have been an honest confession on the part of the great Edinburgh Reviewer, that it would have required some years of reading fitly to review the 'Lives of Knox and Melville.' M'Crie lives in the age which he describes, is familiar not only with its prominent events, but with its principles, its opposing interests, its prejudices, and its errors. He knows its leading characters not merely in their personal history, but in the features of their countenance, and writing with all the freshness and interest of an onlooker, transfers to his history the very form and pressure of the age.

While his narrative is woven with great skill, it commands interest by legitimate means, the judicious selection of incidents, the mixture of action and even adventure with less exciting details, and the shrewd sagacity with which he makes history teach her 'grim lessons in black print.' But he never aims at that dramatic effect which deforms some modern histories, and which while it increases the popularity of their writers is sure to diminish their fame. There is no dazzling of the reader by a display of fireworks. Dr. M'Crie is the true historian of the Scottish Reformation, for he has looked at it from the only proper standing point, and beheld 'God in history.'

It is matter of just regret that the biographer of Knox



did not live to finish the life of Knox's great master,—great alike in thought, in counsel and in action, the Reformer of his own age, the theologian of all ages,—John Calvin.

His sermon on the penitent thief has been pronounced by a competent judge\* worthy to be placed beside that of M'Laurin on 'Glorying in the Cross of Christ.' As there could not be a juster tribute, so there could not be a higher praise.

*Dr. Dick* succeeded to the Theological Chair on the death of Dr. Lawson, and encircled it with fresh honours. A good many years before his elevation to this dignity, he had given to the world an 'Essay on the Inspiration of Scripture,' which in perspicuity of statement, compactness of matter, logical arrangement and energy of argument, military discipline of thought, and elegance of diction obtained for it an early and unchallenged place among the theological classics of the land. His Lectures on the Acts extended his fame if they did not elevate it, and are beautiful models of that expository style of preaching which has helped so much to make the religion of Scotland sound and vigorous, by making her people mighty in the Scriptures.

His Lectures in Theology given to the world after his death were a precious legacy to the Church. They display the varied strength of his finely balanced mind. He does not lean upon the past; and still less does he despise it, but presenting in the seemly drapery of his own elegant style all that is truly valuable in earlier systems, rejects all those refinements and subtleties which so long vitiated and deformed a sound theology, and for which the Church was indebted to Aristotle rather than to Paul. Equally free from the mental vices of the present age as of the past, he never falls into obscurity in the silly affectation of originality, but is uniformly understood by others because he always understands himself. It is justly said of Paley, that one great excellence of his Natural Theology

consists in a judicious selection from earlier works, rejecting all that is insignificant, and retaining all that is essential, and thus making his illustrations more pointed by making them less cumbrous and elaborate. The remark applies to Dr. Dick when compared with the earlier and more elaborate of our dogmatic Divines.

Listening with profound respect to the elegant instructions of Dr. Dick, there might have been seen in the later years of his professorship a student with intellectual countenance, large dark eye, pale cheek, and consumptive form. One day he had delivered a discourse that was deformed by some extravagances, and which had provoked some severe criticisms from his fellow-students ; but under these extravagances the more discriminating eye of the professor had detected the marks of a genius that was soon to lead to fame. He was not mistaken, for that student was *Robert Pollok*, and not long after he published to the world the 'Course of Time.' The greatest critics of the age, not blind to the defects of this great work, but more generously alive to its extraordinary merits, hastened to place upon his brow the poet's crown, and public opinion has since amply confirmed the award. Writers of inferior power have written of late depreciatingly of Pollok, and almost denied him his right to fame. This is the retribution of a too extravagant praise. Many had begun to claim for him a place almost equal to Milton,—a demand which has for the time created a reaction that threatens to dethrone him from his proper eminence. But the reaction will be temporary.

And when these unfavourable influences have passed away, it will be owned that the 'Course of Time' is instinct with that living fire of genius which secures immortality ; and that however far beneath Milton in actual attainment, Pollok has yet drunk at the same spring, and that few since the days of Milton have soared upon a bolder wing or with a nobler and purer aim.

Few men of more powerful understanding have appeared in the Secession than *Graham of Newcastle* and *Ballantyne*

of *Stonehaven*. We name them together, because the fame of both stands intimately connected with the question of 'Civil Establishments of Religion.' The work of Mr. Graham, entitled 'Review of the Ecclesiastical Establishments of Europe,' is decidedly a great work, and though many master-minds have since been applied to the subject, stands unsurpassed in profound and comprehensive thought, range of historical knowledge, or even eloquence. It is the work that has taught those other minds which in their turn have taught the multitude. The treatise of Ballantyne, 'Comparison of Established and Dissenting Churches,' is clear, calm, and philosophic; fit to produce conviction rather than to rouse to action, but when once the people were roused by more stirring writers, invaluable as artillery to be drawn into the battle-field of controversy. His 'Examination of the Human Mind' gives proof of powers that eminently suited him for the region of abstruse inquiry; and, had he lived to complete his course of investigation in a succession of volumes, there is reason to think that he would have done much to illuminate some of those abstruse questions that connect theology with metaphysics, and taken rank with those illustrious names that have already made Scotland so prominent and eminent in the school of mental and moral science.

The grave has but recently closed upon others, such as *Ferrier of Paisley*, and *Jamieson of Methven*, who have just written enough to show the indubitable stamp of genius, and from whose gifted pens men would willingly have welcomed a far larger tribute. We name also, among those from whom the Church would gladly have welcomed more, *Dr. Waugh*, whose name is embalmed among those of the honoured founders of the London Missionary Society—whom the Church in all its evangelical sections loved to claim as a Father, and whose image comes almost the readiest to our minds when we are musing on charity;—*Dr. Mitchell of Glasgow*, the successful prize essayist—the model pastor—whose very life was a sermon, and his very look a benediction—whose excellent gifts were almost hid-

den in his more excellent graces;—*Dr. Peddie*, in his youth the gifted controversialist, who in his answer to *Dr. Porteous*, full of fine irony and quaint humour, not only demolished an assailant but produced a literary gem,—throughout his long and honoured life the sagacious counsellor, whose sentences often sounded like proverbs or epigrams, the gifted lecturer, to whom at the end of a ministry of more than sixty years the people still loved to listen;—*Dr. Heugh*, the graceful and vivacious preacher—the public-spirited philanthropist, whose very leisure was more active than most other men's activity, who perhaps more than any other man has left in the present character of the church the impress of his own missionary heart; and in the 'Irenicum' of his last days cast, in an hour of peril, upon the heaving billows of controversy, won for himself the blessing of the peace-maker;—*Dr. Duncan*, amid the mass of whose ponderous learning there might often be discovered original and ingenious thoughts; and *Dr. Balmer*, clothing theological truths in a new drapery of beauty, so diffident of himself that his cautious doubts were sometimes mistaken for bold speculations, richly furnished with the stores both of modern literature and of earlier theology, in his *Essay on Christian Union*, to which he gave the finishing touch on the week of his death, showing with what mastery and grace he could use his pen when he gave forth his ripened thoughts on congenial themes.

These honoured men have left to the Church which they adorned, not only a legacy of blessings but of responsibilities. The extent of her fellowship—the magnitude of her missionary undertakings—the relation in which she stands to many public questions, and to other ecclesiastical bodies, make us forecast her future history with trembling hope, that kindles into earnest supplication. Her strength lies where it has lain from the beginning, in faithfully adhering to those high interests for the preservation and extension of which God at the first called her into separate being. Let the doctrines of grace, the life and soul of all preaching, continue to be the delight of an educated and pious

ministry,—let her name be identified with every movement that tends to secure the rights of conscience and the true freedom of the Church,—let her place her confidence, both for her maintenance and extension, in that principle which God has given her, and entertain a horror of every human scheme which would purchase freedom from difficulties by submitting to be fed by the hand of the State,—let her cling in faith, even should she be called to stand alone among the Presbyterian churches, to ‘heaven’s easy artless unencumbered plan,’ remembering that there is no public loss which an ecclesiastical body can sustain, so great and irreparable as the loss of moral power,—let her bear in mind that the laws of Christ’s house were only made for Christ’s people, and that therefore in proportion as a communion is free does it need to be pure,—let her follow on with unfaltering step in that missionary career to which she has anew pledged herself in her recent marriage-covenant, the bond of union, and God will assuredly fulfil to her the promise—‘As I have been with thy fathers, so shall I be with thee.’

THE HISTORY

OF THE

RISE OF THE RELIEF CHURCH.





## P R E F A C E.

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EVERY Book should partly be judged of by the abundance and kind of materials which the Author had at the time in his possession. When a large store of important facts and interesting incidents have been placed at his disposal, it may naturally be expected that he should produce a striking and finished production; but if he has to search for them and gather them, in out-corners as the Israelites did the straw wherewith to make their bricks, little should be said though the *tale* should be somewhat deficient. Neither should it be wondered at though he should sometimes gather stubble instead of straw, and the brick made therewith should be somewhat of an inferior quality.

It is a circumstance deeply to be regretted, that the Original Minute Book of the Synod of Relief, and all its accompanying documents, have been consumed by that all-destroyer, *Time*. There remains only two or three tattered leaves of it as a memorial, that such a thing once was. Its fragments now indicate that it has perished beyond the possibility of recovery. To supply such a hiatus is no easy matter, and after the most diligent search among the Magazines of the period, and Congregational records, it has only been very imperfectly done. This fact naturally long acted as a discouragement to the writing of the History of the Denomination. There was a danger, however, that even what was known as to the origin of the Body should be still farther lost. The pamphlets of that day were becoming scarce in the market. The last remains of the generation who had heard Gillespie, Boston, and Bain preach, were dropping into the tomb. Floating reminiscences were passing into oblivion. A general desire was expressed by many individuals, and even a minute was made by the Synod that the thing was desirable.

The work was accordingly executed in 1839, and a History of the Relief Church was published on the responsibility of the Author, for all the facts and opinions which it contains. Recourse was had to every source of information which was open to him, and every thing was gleaned therefrom which he considered of any value. It is believed there are letters of Gillespie's in existence, both in London and America, which would throw light upon his struggles for religious liberty. Access to them may yet be procured.

The following Sketch of the Rise of the Relief Church, is of necessity in a great measure the same with that contained in the

History. A considerable portion of it has been recast or rewritten so as to give it unity, and to fit it for the purpose for which it is to be published. The Relief is here described not as in the History as a church amid other churches, but rather as a church by itself. Other churches are not referred to save where it was imperatively necessary for understanding some fact in the Relief history. When other denominations are mentioned, it is done neither scornfully nor fawningly, but as truth and honesty seemed to require. That I should laud in other churches what the Relief Church condemned in them, since I approve of its principles, would be requiring of me what I would require of no man writing the history of his own denomination.

Though this sketch is necessarily much shorter than the history, as I have confined myself mainly to the rise of the denomination, yet some portions of it are more full than what had formerly been given. Particularly, I have supplied from the writings of Hutchison a more ample view of the doctrine and ecclesiastical polity held and acted on in the Relief Church. This I thought necessary to meet the ends of this publication, and that new brethren living in parts of the country far from Relief churches, might have an opportunity of confirming those favourable impressions which were produced at the time of the union. When two are agreed, there is no reason why they should not walk together in unity and love. As the Fathers preached the same doctrine, so will it also be found on trial to be on the part of their Children. It is gratifying to find that the Christian people, who are generally very good judges of what is scriptural, instructive, and edifying, are calling preachers without any reference to the schools of theology in which they have been educated, and it is confidently believed that the series of publications now begun from the writings of the Secession and Relief Fathers, will bring out the truth, that they were far more one even from the period of their origin than what they ever dreamed of. In time kindred particles have been attracted towards each other, and like two drops of water touching and coalescing they are now one.

Something more would have been said towards the close about the principles of the union now so happily consummated, had it not been understood that in the first part of this volume the happy event had been portrayed by the hand of a master. I have no intention to put patches upon what is already clothed in warm and beautiful diction, but rather to leave it unimpaired to produce its own delightful impression. I shall only say, that were there more love and less pride of party among evangelical Christians, their united forces would speedily conquer the world. Union is strength—for vitality, defence, and warfare.

G. S.

GLASGOW, *June 28, 1848.*

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# THE HISTORY

## OF THE

### RISE OF THE RELIEF CHURCH.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ORIGINATED THE RELIEF CHURCH.

THE Relief Church was somewhat late in its origin. Its principles, however, were ancient as Christianity itself. Its founder was the Rev. Thomas Gillespie, minister of the parish of Carnock, who was deposed in the year 1752, by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, because he conscientiously refused to execute one of its arbitrary injunctions. The occurrence when viewed by itself may appear exceedingly trivial, but when taken in connection with the long train of events which preceded it, and the consequences which ensued, it acquires a magnitude and importance which challenge the investigation of every one who would study or understand the religious history of Scotland. A new era dates from the deposition of Gillespie. The arm of ecclesiastical authority was uplifted for his destruction. The attempt to crush him signally failed. As in the pounding of spices, it only rendered his name more savoury, and diffused to a wider extent the principles for which he contended. Truth and liberty sprung from the ecclesiastical grave which was dug for him.

At the period of his deposition the Church of Scotland was in a very cold, lifeless and declining state. It was

overrun with negative if not with undisguised heresy. Its leading men, who were called 'Moderates,' because of their moderation as to doctrine and discipline, were openly hostile to the doctrines of grace. They did not refuse to sign the Confession of Faith, but they were very shy as to preaching its truths, spoke of it as containing antiquated notions, hinted in quarters where they thought themselves safe that they did not believe some of its doctrines, and constructed their discourses so as to indicate an Arian or Arminian cast of sentiment which could not be misunderstood. They flattered human nature as to its ability to obey the moral law. What the apostles would have called sinful pleasures they called human weaknesses. The Gospel was spoken of simply as a kind of remedial dispensation to mitigate the severity of the moral law, to afford help for the sincere performance of good works, and to place motives of recompence before the mind for the cultivation of virtue. The pungency of sin, the doctrine of salvation by grace, and joy in the atonement, were thrown into the shade. Honesty and friendship, temperance and charity, as enforced by the sages of Greece and Rome, were the themes on which they were wont to expatiate in polished language and well-turned sentences. To be orthodox was to be without learning and taste! Justification, adoption, and sanctification were rude scholastic terms. Learned allusions, and flights of fancy clothed in a kind of half poetic dress, occupied the room of simple, grave, scriptural, and experimental preaching such as Scotland in her best days had been accustomed to hear. The younger clergy were also laying aside the plain and somewhat austere manners of Scottish Presbyterians, and aping the gait, looks, dress, and easy manners of the men of fashion who had been at London and seen the court. They were becoming apt scholars in practising the gaieties of life, which they called polite accomplishments, but which the pen of inspiration called 'the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.' Discipline, except for one or two of the grosser breaches of the moral law, was falling into

disuse, and even these were now compounded for by money. Prayer often ceased to be made in the minister's family circle. The religious exercises on Sabbath were short, formal, bland and pointless. The modish minister ascended the pulpit with the graceful ease of a gentleman, sweetening his words as he wiped his mouth with his white perfumed handkerchief, while a few of the richer heritors, the poorer having mostly gone elsewhere, came and smiled, and bowed, and listened to his essay of thirty minutes and went away. Religion was no longer a thing of deep earnestness.

Such was the philosophic and effeminate state of the Church of Scotland among its younger clergy about the middle of the eighteenth century. From the period of the Revolution (1688), its declension as to vigour of character, soundness in the faith, attachment to the crown-rights of Jesus and the liberties of the people, had been sudden and deplorable. The usual excuses for this great declension are, that about three hundred Episcopal ministers were received into the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the Revolution Settlement on very easy terms, and that they corrupted her greatly in point of doctrine and discipline,—Farther, it is said that Principal Robertson rose like a spoiler, and took away all independence and strength out of her, and made her the passive and obsequious slave of the State. The Principal after 1752 did become the rising leader of the moderate party, and for many years thereafter held the reins with a firm unwavering hand; but he did not open his mouth in the Assembly till 1751, so that the Assembly was corrupted, deteriorated, and was helping with a willing hand to bind the yoke of patronage around its own neck long before he appeared. He was himself an embodiment of the temper of the Assembly at the period when he became a licentiate of the Church, though like some other children he speedily went far beyond his compeers and teachers. Besides, it seems a base slander to say that the Episcopal ministers who conformed at the Revolution corrupted the Church of Scotland. The far greater number

of them had their abode in the north-east of Scotland, where Episcopacy at one time greatly prevailed; whereas it was about Edinburgh and Glasgow, in Ayrshire and in Galloway, which were famous covenanting districts, that men arose who were slavish in their political principles, and who defiled and corrupted the pure doctrines of the gospel with Pelagian and Arian tenets. Let the real apostates from the doctrines of salvation by grace bear the blame, and not those who were innocent. On this point the truth for some reason or other has not generally been told.

An honest mind which has no old covenanting theory to support, will be at no great loss to discover the welling fountain of the evils which so speedily overflowed the Revolution Church. She was no longer the same popular institution which she once was after she was fairly and fully taken into connection with the State, and supported out of the Treasury. Instead of being a Church protesting against tyrannical Acts of Council, she was now an expecting Church spreading out her lap for royal favours. She might indeed deceive herself by thinking that she was still as independent as when she sat upon her native hills and defied prelatie kings attempting to force their Liturgy upon her, but insensibly she bowed to the throne that sustained her, and by little and little withdrew from the people, and adopted the obsequious and worldly maxims of the Court. The visits made now and then by the Scottish clergy to London on matters connected with their Church, had a most injurious influence upon their Calvinistic principles, and their presbyterian zeal for popular election and Church purity. England was evidently the very land for priests to dwell in. Their work was easy and well paid. They preached little, and what they read on Sabbath from a velvet cushion was clothed in soft and sweet Arminian terms, while they themselves rolled in wealth and dwelt in palaces. Dr. Witherspoon, who lived at the time, in his parable of the corporation of servants,\* refers to this as the source whence

\* Works, vol. vi. p. 341.

the Church of Scotland after its full establishment by the State received its most deleterious influences. 'By this time' (the time we are writing about), 'the servants had not only degenerated in point of fidelity and diligence, but had made great encroachments upon the Constitution itself. They had a prodigious hankering after the high sounding titles and immense revenues which were given to servants in the neighbouring province. It grieved them to hear, and sometimes when sent upon business to that country, to see that some of the overseers' (Bishops, Deans, Rectors, &c.) 'lived in splendid palaces and were carried about in chariots, while they themselves were still obliged to wear the dress of servants and generally to walk a-foot. Gladly would they have introduced these offices into their own province, but the great men who had hitherto assisted them dreaded the expense and would not agree to it.'

Throughout Scotland at large, however, there was still in country districts a majority of ministers who were orthodox, pious, and faithful in the discharge of their ministerial duties, and when they combined and exerted themselves in returning elders of the right stamp, they could out-vote and control the court party, which had its strength among the lounging expecting advocates of the Parliament House of Edinburgh, who got themselves made elders to rule the Kirk, and to make her the passive instrument of the State. During the long pending process between the Erskines—who nobly originated the Secession—and the General Assembly, before it issued in their complete separation from the Establishment, and when the country was roused to prevent if possible the breach, the popular party were for several years the governing party in the General Assemblies of the Church. The Moderates, about the year 1735, allowed them to have their own way, and many petty and salutary reforms were accomplished. A commission, composed of two ministers and Colonel John Erskine of Carnock, ruling elder, was sent to London, to use every means to have the Patronage act repealed. They addressed the King, and pled 'the discontents and divisions' which were beginning



to appear, as reasons why 'the Church and people of Scotland should have their just right and privilege as to the settling of ministers restored to them.' Their efforts in high places, as might have been predicted, proved unsuccessful. The Assembly, in 1736, was still mainly composed of the popular party, and being desirous, at least outwardly, to please the country and propitiate the Seceders, it put on record, printed, and dispersed over the land 'An Act against the intrusion of Ministers into vacant Congregations.' This act we shall yet have occasion to quote as an important element in the deposition of Gillespie. At present it is sufficient to refer to it. The Seceders, in spite of all the threatening and coaxing measures which were employed, having refused to return into the bosom of the Church, the popular party in the Assembly again relaxed their efforts, and gave way to the Moderates. The pending case of the Seceders was thereafter terminated. The Erskines viewing the Kirk from a new position, saw her more spotted and defiled than they had previously supposed. When brought for the last time to the bar of the Assembly they bravely declined the authority and jurisdiction of the Established judicatories, and the Assembly deposed them as ministers of the Church of Scotland, and cast them out of her communion. After this rupture the Church as a whole greatly suffered, though the Evangelical portion of it was stirred up in different localities to be faithful and diligent above measure. Several revivals throughout the country soon took place, in which they were greatly aided by the presence and preaching of Whitefield. The rebellion in 1745 broke out. The Government fawned upon the ministers of the Establishment, and attempted to make them its spies and informers. Several of them became soldiers, and commanded corps of volunteers. The Seceders split among themselves. All fear in regard to them covering Scotland with churches at the moment ceased, and the Kirk chuckling over their contentions, allowed her zeal of rivalry to go out, and soon became worse than ever. In the secession of the Erskines and their

adherents, it had lost not a few of its most able, eloquent, and faithful ministers. The corruption which had begun at the head in Edinburgh, now threatened speedily to pervade the whole corporate body. Every violent settlement throughout the country added another to the number of those who protected heresy, who discouraged discipline, conformed to the world, and bound the yoke of patronage closer and firmer upon the necks of the Christian people. The brave peasantry of Scotland, many of whose fathers had spilt their best blood for the attainment of that liberty wherewith Christ had made his people free, murmured loud and deep over the piece-meal loss of their privileges and freedom, and were ready to clap their hands at those 'dumb dogs,' as they called them, who would not 'bark' for the warning and protection of the flock.

As the Moderate clergy (using the designation for the sake of distinctness) were very unpopular from their doctrine and manner of life, and could expect access to no pastorate through popular favour, they on their part were greatly stirred up to discountenance the free election of ministers. They strenuously encouraged and strengthened the hands of the patrons in having their presentees ordained in the face of the greatest opposition. Parliament had re-enacted the law of patronage so far back as 1712, and bound the yoke upon the neck of the Church of Scotland. She was too free and independent however at once tamely to put it on, and the Church courts having as they thought the trial and ordination of ministers in their own hand without let or hinderance, and making at the time common cause with the people, set the patrons for a long period at defiance, and managed to have the popular candidate ordained. But patronage being the law both of the State and Church, it gradually made way. The continual dropping of water wears away the hardest rock. Popular election, it was said, was found to gender heats and contentions. The principal heritors disliked to be voting with their farm-servants, and the clergy often had their favourites whom, though unpopular, they wished to succeed. The court

party hanging about the Court of Session, which was the focus of arbitrary and what they called *constitutional* measures, together with that portion of the clergy who clave to them, and who thought it vulgar to be consulting the people, helped on the working and adoption of the old Popish law of patronage, and denuded the people of their scriptural right to choose their own office-bearers. The popular or orthodox party in the Church, though now the minority in the *Assembly*, continued for several years sufficiently strong in the *Presbyteries* to render in a great measure nugatory the power of the patron. If they did not manage, with a good body of lay elders to back them, on some plea or other, to get the presentee set aside, and to get appointed what was called 'a moderation at large,' they refused to take any part in his ordination; and if the *Presbytery* were unanimous in this judgment, the matter stood still, unless the General Assembly sent a committee of their number, which they not unfrequently did, to perform the ungracious work, often rendered more unseemly and ungracious, by the presence of a troop of dragoons opening the way through the people to the pulpit.

Two things about the year 1750 greatly hastened on submission to the law of patronage, which the people of Scotland at large regarded as an intolerable grievance and oppression. First, some of the patrons carried what they called their legal rights before the Court of Session. It was found by their Lordships, 'That *Presbyteries* refusing a presentation duly tendered to them in favour of a qualified minister, against which presentation or presentee there lies no legal objection, and admitting another person to be minister, the patron has right to retain the stipend as in the case of a vacancy.' This stringent law for bridling *Presbyteries* was enforced about this time, both in the case of Stoddart of Culross, and Dick of Lanark. The administrators of the criminal law of the country also stepped forward and inflicted imprisonment, scourging, pillory, and banishment to the penal colonies upon those who in a tumultuous manner opposed the admission of the patrons'

presentee. Men and women, who gloried in Presbyterian freedom gained by the shed blood of their venerated martyrs, were banished across the seas as vagabonds, because they would not tamely receive the man to feed their souls whom they conscientiously believed came to lull them into spiritual sloth, rather than to quicken them and feed them with the bread of heaven.

Secondly, the General Assembly began to set its heart upon an augmentation of stipends throughout the country at large. Many of them felt themselves greatly pinched by the smallness of their incomes. They had proved themselves true to the house of Hanover during the rebellion, and some very flattering letters were addressed to them by the Government. It was therefore considered proper before Royal gratitude had time to cool, to present a humble petition for pecuniary aid at the door of the national treasury, and to importune and obtain its favours. The aristocracy of Scotland, however, who feared that the augmentation would come out of those unexhausted teinds which they held in their hands, strenuously opposed the measure. Among other things, they circulated a printed statement among the members of the British Parliament, that the Presbyteries of Scotland were often disobedient to the law of the land as to patronage, setting aside the patrons' presentee, and getting a call moderated for some other person, and that they in justice could be entitled to no augmentation till they showed that they were obedient to the statute law of the country as to their Church. The Church knew or feared that this argument would be used against them, and like men of great worldly prudence, at the very meeting of Assembly (1750) at which they appointed deputies to prosecute the scheme of augmentation in London, they also recommended to their Commission 'to consider of a method for securing the execution of the sentences of the Assembly' as to presentations, and in the mean time 'if any Presbyteries were disobedient and did not execute the sentences of this Assembly, in the particular causes which have been determined by them, the Commission are em-

powered to call such Presbyteries before them, and censure them as they shall see cause.' This prospective reformation as to obedience to the injunctions of the Assembly about the settlement of the patrons' presentees (for these were the only injunctions disputed and resisted by Presbyteries) did not however smooth the way for obtaining the desired augmentation. The House of Commons in the mean time cushioned the matter. From all that transpired the clergy could not but learn, that submission to the law of patronage was by the Government and principal heritors of Scotland expected of them. Having got their lesson, they henceforth proved themselves very apt scholars, and had recourse to the most stringent measures to procure the settlement of the patrons' presentee. A fresh crisis was thus hurried on. A whole community however could not suffer themselves to be trodden in the dust and to have pastors placed over them by 'a riding committee' from Edinburgh, without struggling for their ancient freedom and seeking relief. There is a point at which oppression becomes intolerable ; and to a religious people no oppression is half so galling as that which is spiritual. An instrument was unexpectedly found, to be the mouth of God to a generation who were enslaved, groaning under oppression and eagerly panting for relief. *Relief came.*

## CHAPTER II.

THE HISTORY OF GILLESPIE—HIS CHARACTER—AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH BROUGHT HIM TO THE BAR OF THE ASSEMBLY.

THE person who was to be the instrument for bursting the fetters which the tools of Government, for selfish and secular purposes, were now binding upon the Church of Scotland, and who was destined to set up a new ecclesiastical organization, was the Rev. Thomas Gillespie, minister of Carnock. He was born in the year 1708 at Clearburn, in the parish of Duddingston near Edinburgh. His father was a farmer and brewer. He was the only child of a second marriage. His father having died while he was yet a child, his education and support devolved upon his widowed mother, who was a person sincerely religious, very industrious, and possessed of much sound discretion.

Little is known of the first years of Gillespie's life. The general fact has been handed down, that in early life he manifested no appearances of vital piety. This greatly distressed his mother, yet she did not despair of a saving change being wrought upon him. As her own advices and prayers seemed to fail in producing the desired effect, she prudently and assiduously brought him under the awakening influences of a preached gospel; took him to those tent preachings and sacramental occasions throughout the country, where the most able and heart-stirring discourses and appeals were to be heard, and latterly when he was about twenty years of age, introduced him to Boston of Ettrick, the well known author of the Fourfold State of Man, and mentioned her extreme sorrow that he had hitherto re-



mained callous and indifferent about his personal salvation. Boston dealt faithfully and affectionately with him in the presence of his mother, concerning his eternal interests. His admonitions were signally blessed. A visible change almost immediately thereafter ensued. The young raw youth was quickened. He was rendered thoughtful. From the period that his heart was touched with a sense of religion, he turned his thoughts towards the Christian ministry, as a profession in which he might honour his Saviour, gratify the bent of his own inclinations, and labour for the good of men.

Before he had finished his course of academic and theological education in the University of Edinburgh, his mother had separated from the Church of Scotland, and connected herself with the Church of the Secession. She heartily sympathized with the Erskines and their coadjutors, in their strenuous advocacy of the doctrines of the Reformation, and their efforts to stem the tide of error and relaxed discipline which was threatening to deluge the land. By her advice, her son in the last year of his theological course withdrew from the Divinity Hall in Edinburgh, and went to Perth and enrolled himself a student of divinity in the Hall of the Secession. Having conversed with the Rev. Mr. Wilson the professor, 'and understood on what plan of principles they were going,' he was dissatisfied with their views, and in the course of ten days thereafter voluntarily left it. With ample attestations, from a considerable number of the most distinguished ministers of the Church of Scotland, of his piety, prudent and exemplary deportment, progress in philosophical and theological literature, and spiritual gifts, he repaired to the academy at Northampton, presided over by the celebrated Dr. Doddridge, where he finished his theological course. He was also, while residing in England, licensed and ordained to the office of the ministry at large by a number of Independent ministers: Dr. Doddridge presiding on the occasion.

In the spring of the year 1741, he again returned to Scotland, and connected himself with the Established Church.

In a short time thereafter, he received a presentation from Colonel Erskine to the parish of Carnock, and afterwards got a regular call from the parish and congregation. He produced the *deed* of his ordination by Dr. Doddridge and other dissenting ministers in England, to the Presbytery of Dunfermline who sustained it; and having signed the Confession, with 'an explanation respecting the power of the civil magistrate' in religion, he was ordained minister of Carnock, about four miles west of Dunfermline.

All accounts agree that he was a man of good talents, respectable attainments, deep piety, and of great fidelity and earnestness in the discharge of his official and pastoral duties. He was modest, retiring, timid, and somewhat of a nervous and desponding state of mind. He spent much of his time in tears, prayers, and in watching over the progress of religion in his own heart. He was engaged in a continual warfare with the temptations of Satan, his own corrupt desires, and worldly inclinations. In the earlier part of his ministry, he feared greatly lest by the evil one he should be overcome. He cried mightily to Christ, and used all the means prescribed in Scripture, and suggested by divines, for quenching the darts of Satan, and promoting in his soul the growth of vital piety, so that heaven might not frown but smile upon him. The rigorous internal watching and discipline, which he continually kept up over his own spirit, gave a very decided direction and tone to his preaching. It was of a solemn, experimental, and heart-searching character, and was greatly prized by those who were truly in earnest about their salvation.

The cast of his preaching was also no doubt modified in part by those revivals which he witnessed, in the first years of his ministry, at Kilsyth and elsewhere, in which he had taken a deep interest, and where he was a fellow-worker for good, along with Robe and the celebrated Whitefield. The Rev. Mr. Robe says in his narrative, that he was his principal assistant, 'and but for him, humanly speaking, many of the distressed must have miscarried, or continued much longer in their spiritual distress.' Being a sincere

believer in the doctrines of grace, and being also of what is called the 'Marrow' or Boston school of divinity, he had great freedom in making free and unlimited offers of salvation to his hearers, and in plying their consciences with the acceptance of mercy and grace upon the very spot. He spoke like one who had it in charge to convert men by every sermon which he preached, and every appeal which he made.

His opinions as to the kingdom of Christ were so enlightened, liberal, spiritual and scriptural, that the wonder is, that ever he was found within the pale of an Established Church. He held that the kingdom of Christ was not of this world,—that for civil authorities to claim power in matters of religion was invading the authority of Jesus,—that magistrates were not the last resort in religious causes,—that they were not to make their conscience the standard, and their belief the rule to their subjects,—that they were not to infringe the right of private judgment,—emit penal or other statutes against conscientious convictions. And farther, that patronage was antichristian,—that patrons, heritors, and town councillors, are not to thrust a minister upon an unwilling and reclaiming congregation,—that the people should not forbear to make opposition to the measure if attempted,—and that for ministers of religion to countenance the exercise of patronage was a notable instance of the art of Hell for ruining souls.\*

A person trained up at the feet of Dr. Doddridge, and holding sentiments such as these, was not likely to give his countenance or support to the settlement of a minister in the midst of an unwilling and reclaiming congregation. His own opinions in this matter were no doubt fortified by those of his friend Col. Erskine, who was the principal heritor in his parish, and who had been Commissioner, as we have already stated, from the Assembly in 1735, to London to procure the repeal of the Patronage Act. Gillespie must have been plastic as a piece of clay, and utterly

\* The History of the Relief Church, pp. 32—35, and authorities there quoted.

without principle, if he, after recording these things as his deliberate opinions in a book which he intended to publish, and which was published after his death, could yet take an active part in a violent settlement.

It was not long after these things were written in his volume on Temptation, that his honesty was tried, and his firmness of principle was put severely to the test. He bore the shock,—made the sacrifice, and was found faithful. The following were the circumstances. Truly they were not of his own seeking.

The Rev. Andrew Richardson, minister of the parish of Broughton, Presbytery of Biggar, was presented in 1749 to the parish of Inverkeithing, by the patron, Captain Philip Anstruther, which presentation he accepted, and the patron of course requested the Presbytery of Dunfermline, to which Inverkeithing belonged, to take the necessary steps for his translation and induction. A call was moderated. The adherents were very few, mostly non-resident heritors. The people had set their affections upon Mr. William Adam, minister of a Dissenting congregation at Painswick, England. For him they moderated a kind of irregular call among themselves, laid it upon the table of the Presbytery, and insisted upon its prosecution. The two calls could scarcely however be regarded as 'competing calls,' for the latter was certainly irregular, and seems never to have had any weight attached to it.

The majority of the Presbytery, after examining carefully into the case by sending a deputation of their number to Inverkeithing, narrowly to sift the matter on the spot, refused to take any active hand in carrying the settlement into effect, as the people at large were very strongly opposed to it. All the elders except one refused to submit to the ministry of Mr. Richardson. The general interests of religion within the parish and throughout the whole bounds of the Presbytery, were in danger of being greatly injured. The cause was carried by appeal before the Synod of Fife, and the Commission of the Assembly (1750), which enjoined the Presbytery of Dunfermline to proceed forthwith to

the admission and settlement of Mr. Richardson at Inverkeithing. It was the firm refusal of the Presbytery to proceed to the induction of the presentee, notwithstanding the injunction of the Commission, that brought the question again into discussion, which had of late occupied much of the attention of the Church, whether inferior judicatories were bound contrary to their conscience to carry into effect the sentences of superior courts. The patron and the callers of Mr. Richardson maintained that they were, and said that inferior courts refusing to obey the sentences of superior courts was destructive of all government, particularly Presbyterian government, which consisted in the parity of pastors and subordination of Church judicatories. And farther, that a refusal to induct would disturb the peace of the parish, and produce turmoil and confusion throughout Scotland. They also pinched the recusant Presbytery by reminding them that every minister at the period of his admission into the Church, was bound by the sacred tie of an oath to obey the lawful sentences of the superior judicatories; and that their refractoriness proceeded from the contemptible fear of losing some of their hearers. They ridiculed them as being 'people ridden.' In answer to these things, the majority of the Presbytery affirmed that they had laboured to disabuse themselves of all mistakes and ill-grounded scruples, and still that they found such difficulties remaining that they could not actively proceed with the settlement. They held that there were few maxims plainer in the whole system of natural and revealed religion, than that every man has a right to judge for himself in the regulation of his conduct,—that no man can give a blind and implicit obedience safely to the decisions of any body of men however venerable their authority,—and that every man must be determined by his own sentiments after a full and impartial inquiry. 'All sober-minded Protestants,' said they, 'who have thought on these matters, are agreed that this right of private judgment is inalienable.' It could not be renounced by ten thousand oaths, and they had never renounced it, for in



their ordination vow there was an express qualification—they vowed submission *in the Lord*, and this was well known to all. They did not deny that the sentences of courts of the last resort must take effect, and that consequently the admission of Mr. Richardson in virtue of the sentence of the Commission must now be consummated, but there were other ways of doing it than by disannulling the right of private judgment, and compelling men to do it contrary to their conscience. While they rejected the doctrine of ‘implicit obedience to the sentences of superiors as being unconstitutional, and not necessary for the government of the church, they equally repudiated the charge of being blindly led by their people.’ They said smoothly but cuttingly, ‘we think it expedient to lead the people softly, quite agreeably to the temper and practice of the apostles, and the greatest of them, in whom it was not meanness of spirit, but the natural effect of that true greatness of mind and goodness of heart which his deep conceptions of God and the sublime spirit of the gospel inspired, to be gentle to all men, and in lesser things to exercise forbearance towards the brethren, as a rule of prudence necessary for the more extensive success of the gospel.’\*

There were also some matters of lesser moment which set the majority of the Presbytery a little on edge. Their superiors had so far intermeddled in the affair as to get the pastoral relation between Mr. Richardson and his parish dissolved without their concurrence; and since they had taken one active step in the matter, the Presbytery thought they should take the remainder and complete the induction. They would not finish a disagreeable business which others had begun. If there was honour or disgrace in it, let it be all their own. The Commission had carried into effect many such settlements throughout the country during the last twenty years, by a committee of their number,

\* See Appendix to Antipatronage Report. Inverkeithing Settlement.



and why stop short now and single them out, and compel them to do what they believed to be a sin?

It was in these circumstances that the cause came again before the Commission in March 1752. It had been twice there before, and on the last occasion (November 1751) the Dunfermline Presbytery had been enjoined to admit Mr. Richardson to Inverkeithing, with certification that if they did not execute the sentence, the Commission would proceed against them to a very high censure. They thus came before the Commission judicially condemned. Their conscience however did not condemn them. They were grave and pious men, acting according to the word of God, and afraid to do aught injurious to the interests of religion. They pled before the Commission, that the authority of the Supreme Court could effect the settlement without them. As inferiors they acknowledged they had no right to oppose it, but neither was it right to force them to execute it when it was contrary to their conscience, and when they were convinced, after weighing the matter most seriously, that it would mar the success of the gospel in their bounds. As honest men they assured the Commission, they could not support themselves with the reflection that they had merely acted in obedience to their superiors, and therefore 'it was the deed of their superiors and not theirs.' This distinction could not weigh with them in the determination of their conduct. The authority of man could not supersede the authority of God. Sin was still sin.

The Commission felt the power of their appeal. They abrogated the sentence of censure passed in the way of threat by a former Commission; and to harmonize the authority of the Church and the conscience of the Dunfermline Presbytery, they relieved them altogether of the matter, and enjoined the Synod of Fife as *their Committee* to complete the settlement. This was a somewhat dexterous expedient in pinching circumstances. It preserved intact the authority of the Assembly; it secured the admission of the presentee; and it saved the Presbytery from acting contrary to their convictions. The rights of the

Christian people however were to be sacrificed. The patron's power was to be silently acquiesced in as supreme. The Moderate party should have been satisfied with these things. At every fresh settlement they were abridging the power of the people. The last shreds of it were all but annihilated. An over anxiety, however, to draw the struggling fish ashore before it is all but dead, often snaps the line and gives the fish again to the open stream. Dr. Robertson and his friends were resolved to carry the *principle of passive obedience in Church Courts*, as well as to effect the Inverkeithing settlement, and therefore they dissented from the sentence of the Commission and appealed to the Assembly: and thus the great question of implicit obedience came to be wrought up with Gillespie's deposition. There was only one minister above ten years' standing who signed the dissent and appeal. It was the young men against the Fathers. It was no longer the mere settlement of Richardson, but a great constitutional principle, which was felt by both parties in the Church to be at stake. Men of the greatest talent engaged in the contest. The struggle was kept up for several years; and ultimately a new party, as will yet appear, was raised up in Providence, headed by Gillespie and unshackled by the State, who held the great principles of *forbearance in lesser matters, and the divine right of the Christian people to elect their own office-bearers*.

Things now began seriously to threaten an approaching contest which would shake the Church of Scotland to its foundation, and consolidate the power of the section which was successful in the struggle. Reasons of dissent from the judgment of the Commission, resolving to inflict no censure on the Presbytery of Dunfermline for their disobedience in relation to the settlement of Inverkeithing, were drawn up by Dr. Robertson, and subscribed by Dr. Blair, Mr. Home, and others. It was the work of six weeks, and every word is said to have been balanced with the utmost care. They were not men who would allow a slovenly document to pass out of their hands. These 'Reasons' were answered by the Commission in a paper of consider-

able length, which is understood to have been mainly drawn up by Dr. Webster. The two papers, published at the time in the Scots Magazine, contain the most authentic documents extant of the general principles of the two great parties into which the Church was then divided.\*

In examining carefully these two documents, which have been called 'the Manifestoes' of the Moderate and Popular party, it is evident that the turning point of the controversy was the relative estimation in which they held the civil establishment of the Church. The Moderate party considered that the Church should be a Government institution, which should be under arbitrary authority, and yield prompt and passive obedience like the different corps of an army; and that Church censures should tame all recusants to the decrees of that Assembly, in which royalty presided, and where the Royal crown overshadowed the Moderator's chair. Whereas the Popular party held the adventitious circumstance of the Church being established and endowed, cheap indeed, and that its pastors in all their decisions about inducting ministers according to the law of the land, were merely civil functionaries, and *that it was a prostitution of the discipline of Christ's house to censure any minister ecclesiastically for what was at most a mere political offence.* They were so far from considering a civil establishment as being required under the gospel, that they held it was an abuse of Christian discipline even to employ it for its support.

It is a remarkable fact, that in neither of these papers referred to is there any reference to the law of Christ upon the point at issue. The Confession and Acts of Assembly are quoted, but the popular party strangely forgot to fortify their pleadings for liberty of conscience in external matters by appealing to the practice of the apostolic Churches, in which every one was allowed to do that which was right in his own eyes, about meats and drinks and outward observances, if he held the great essential truths of Christi-

\* Morren's Annals. Stewart's Life of Robertson. Cook's Life of Hill. Scots Mag. 1752.

anity. Compulsion in lesser things was unknown. Every man was to be fully persuaded in his own mind, and if there were differences of opinion about secondary matters, still they were to forbear with each other, as members of the same Church and disciples of the same Master. 'Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereunto we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.' This overlook was the more inexcusable, as the Confession of Faith, which is the law of the Church of Scotland, says nothing about an establishment of religion, nor how it is to be sustained by Church censures; while in its principles of free communion it evidently presupposes Christians to differ in lesser matters. When the Confession was silent as to the mind of the Church about the tenor of Scripture, the appeal should have been direct to the word of God.

The Moderates prepared for the approaching struggle in the ensuing Assembly with great circumspection and diligence, and employed every agency which they thought would secure their triumph, and impose absolute obedience upon every member of the Church. The matter of contest was, in some respects, of the same kind as that which originated the Secession. If carried, it was to be even far more oppressive to tender consciences. Then, it was contended, that no man in his ministrations should be at liberty in the pulpit to denounce the decisions and corruptions of the Church; but now every minister was to be compelled to execute, contrary to his conscience, every decree of the Assembly, whatever was its unconstitutional character, and whether it was founded on the mere enactments of civil Government or upon the laws of Christ. The strict discipline and blind obedience of the army was to be introduced into the house of God, where liberty of private judgment is indispensable, and which enters to a certain extent into the very nature of Church fellowship.

The friends of absolute obedience being fully aware of

the importance of the contest, resorted to cautious and vigorous measures to secure their end, and regain the ground which they had unexpectedly lost in the Commission. To pre-occupy public favour, their reasons of dissent, instead of being quietly carried up and laid on the Assembly's table, which was the constitutional mode, were published in the Scots Magazine for April ; so that they were widely circulated before the meeting of the Assembly, and yet their opponents had not the means of meeting them in public with their answers. Their manifesto did not and could not appear in the same popular periodical till after the meeting of the Assembly in May. The Magazine was not published till the end of the month. The cause was then terminated. Care was also taken to get a great number of the Moderate party returned as representatives, so as to secure a powerful majority. The Moderator of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, Gilbert Hamilton of Cramond, in his official character, preached and published a sermon on the 5th May, in which he prejudged the case. He pointedly called upon the rulers of the Church 'to exercise their authority against those who bid defiance to its judicature, lest they should be hardened in their lawless contumacy.' This was whetting the sword for the battle. It was infamous.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DEPOSITION OF GILLESPIE.

THE person who was the main instrument in accomplishing the deposition of Gillespie, was the Rev. William Robertson of Gladsmuir, better known as Principal Robertson, and for many years after his translation to Edinburgh in 1756, the acknowledged leader of the Moderate party. He was the son of the Rev. Mr. Robertson, Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh. His father was a Calvinist of respectable attainments, courteous manners, and a useful practical preacher. To his son he gave an excellent education, and, from whatever motives, put into his hands Arminian works in divinity, which led him to adopt opinions at variance with the standards of the Church. The Principal was of a low school on theology, and preached on Christian character and practice, overlooking in a great measure those evangelical principles from which all holy practice must proceed.

For the first six or seven years of his ministerial life, he never spoke in the Assembly, nor was he known in the Church as a person who was likely to rise to that position which he afterwards attained. He was known to be of the Moderate side of the Church, an accomplished scholar, and a favourer of patronage. A casual circumstance strongly enlisted his feelings in its behalf, and brought him forward as the eloquent, able, and unshrinking advocate of high Church principles and practice. In 1750, Mr. Syme, who was his personal friend, and who a few months afterwards married his sister who lived with him, was ordained at Alloa by a Riding Committee of the Assembly. Not a member of the Presbytery was present. Mr. Robertson however was



there. The settlement was most unpopular. It was attended by mobbing, violence, and the effusion of blood. Four companies of soldiers on the day of ordination overawed the multitude. The Court of Justiciary afterwards convicted, fined, banished, and imprisoned some of the inhabitants for their riotous conduct. The ardent and vigorous mind of Robertson was roused, and as the Assembly at its meeting that year, as already noticed, had indicated its mind that measures should be taken to make Presbyteries execute all settlements, if enjoined by the Assembly, he bent all his intellectual strength and eloquence upon the accomplishment of this object. He could not but feel the disgrace of his brother-in-law to be great, having been ordained by strangers assisted by soldiers, without the presence of a single member of Presbytery. A scripturally constituted mind would have set itself to devise some moral means to remedy such an abuse of patronage and ecclesiastical domination, but he resolved to crush the opposition of the people, and to compel all ministers with a scrupulous conscience about patronage, either to yield to the arbitrary injunctions of the Assembly, or quit the Establishment.

It was not long till he had an opportunity of insisting upon absolute submission to the arbitrary injunctions of the Assembly by all the Presbyteries of the Church, ay, and by every member thereof. At the meeting of the Assembly next year (1751), the case of the parish of Torphichen came before the Supreme Court. The settlement of Mr. Watson the presentee had already been twice ordered by the Assembly to be carried into effect by the Presbytery, and twice they had passively resisted. The opposition in the parish was so great, that their usefulness in their own congregations would to all appearance be destroyed if they should attempt it. Now was the opportunity for Robertson and his friends, who were resolved to accomplish universal subordination. Accordingly, Home of Athelstaneford (the author of the tragedy of 'Douglas') first came forward as the abettor of absolute submission to the power of the Church. He was followed by Robertson. They were both young men,

and had never spoken in the Assembly before. Their aim was to get the Linlithgow Presbytery censured and suspended from the office of the ministry, as a warning to all other refractory members who should plead conscience for not obeying the injunctions of the Supreme Court. They managed to get them censured, but the Assembly, though keenly urged by Robertson, refused by a great majority of votes to suspend them. To suspend a whole Presbytery, would have been a vigorous and rigorous sentence indeed! Even the vote of censure was considered by many as a measure of extreme severity, and a gross prostitution of the *censures of the Church* to maintain a *mere civil enactment*. On the day of settlement not a member of the Presbytery of Linlithgow attended. It was accomplished by a Riding Committee, of which Robertson was convener. He preached and presided on the occasion, and showed that he was resolved to carry forward, over tender consciences and the remonstrances of the people, his arbitrary measures.

As the rising leader of the Moderates and the champion of Church authority, Robertson was not a little discomfited by the sentence of the Commission in March 1752, already referred to, in which they not only refused to inflict censure upon the recusant Dunfermline Presbytery, but even freed them from obedience to a sentence of the Commission of the Church, because it was contrary to their conscience to carry it into effect. This was flying in the face of his views of Church government. What had conscience to do with obedience to an enactment of the Church? Like a giant struck down he rose from his fall with fresh fury. Full of great mental resources, he roused himself to gigantic efforts. By his dissent and appeal to the Assembly, he had suspended for a time the victory of the popular and orthodox party. He knew he would thereby get them as rebels sisted at a bar where kingly authority would back and support priestly domination. His measures were deliberately taken. His manifesto, as noticed already, was carefully drawn up and timeously published. A majority of partisans were secured. The willing ear of the Royal Com-

missioner was bespoken; and he with all the 'kingcraft' possible, was to give his countenance and support to the maintenance of absolute authority.

As very much depended upon the chairman in a popular Assembly rightly guiding the debate, and as few members, unless called upon by the Moderator, then ventured to address the House, the Moderate party took care to get a person elected to that office, who was not only favourable to their views, but who would give weight to their decision. They fixed on their best man. The Rev. Patrick Cuming, professor of Church History, Edinburgh, the leader of the Moderate party, who had the support of Government, and who was acknowledged to be its mouth-piece, was therefore exalted to the chair. He had been Moderator in 1749, but as an onslaught was to be made on the liberties of the Church and strong opposition was expected, he in the most barefaced and anomalous manner was made Moderator again, that all might see what the Earl of Isla, who had the management of Scotch affairs, and who employed Cuming as his tool, had his heart set upon accomplishing. The other Government officers also lent their aid. The Earl of Leven was that year the Royal Commissioner to the Assembly. He was a bold outspoken man, who was accustomed in his opening speeches to tell the Assembly what he wished them to do. He was no 'looker-on,' as the Commissioner has been softly called. He did not whisper by his clerks in Committee-rooms what the Government expected of the Church, but honestly and openly told them what was their duty as an Established Church. On the present occasion he charged them more directly as to the proper line of their procedure, than ever a judge did a jury, and no one protested against his language as being destructive of their independence as an ecclesiastical court. 'The main intention,' said he, 'of your meeting is frustrated, if your judgments and decisions are not to be held final; if inferior courts continue to assume that liberty they have taken upon themselves, in too many instances, of disputing and disobeying the decisions of their

superiors; it is now more than high time to think of putting a stop to this growing evil, otherwise such anarchy and confusion will be introduced into the Church as will inevitably not only break us into pieces among ourselves, but make us likewise the scorn and derision of our enemies.\* Nay, he even went a step farther, and told them that they were so to punish the delinquents, as 'effectually to restrain others from following their very unjustifiable example.' The Lord Advocate, William Grant, afterwards Lord Prestongrange, who had formerly been Procurator and principal Clerk of the Church, lent his influence also to the moderate party, and openly avowed in the Assembly, 'that they would enlighten the consciences of some ministers through their stipends.'† Every kind of political influence and of ecclesiastical power was thus combined and brought to bear upon the Dunfermline Presbytery; and long before the Inverkeithing case came on, the line of procedure was chalked out, and it was resolved that they should have a heavy sentence inflicted upon them, that others 'seeing might fear.'

The affair of Inverkeithing was taken up on Monday the 18th of May. The matter was very hurriedly proceeded in. Dr. Robertson opened the debate in a speech which was an echo of 'the Reasons of Dissent,' and which his friends have lauded as being argumentative and convincing, and which made a deep impression on the Assembly. He was seconded by Mr. Home, so that the champions of implicit obedience on the part of the inferior judicatures were still the same as last year in the case of Torphichen, only he who formerly wielded the sword now carried the shield, and certainly it was a more befitting situation for him. The Commission were also heard in vindication of the sentence by which they had refused to censure the Dunfermline Presbytery, and had appointed the Synod of Fife to complete Mr. Richardson's induction. The mind of the Assembly was already made up. It had no patience. It

\* Scots Magazine, May 1752.

† A Loud Cry, p. 24.

was so niggard of its time that it did not allow Robertson's Reasons of Dissent\* to be read, and of course it consigned also, in this way, the long and pungent answers to them, which had been prepared by Webster, to a silent grave. This was any thing but an injury to Dr. Robertson and his friends, as their paper had been printed in the most widely circulated periodical of the day, but it was a serious evil to the popular party that their document was not allowed to see the light, and disabuse the minds of some at least of false and erroneous impressions. The Assembly without a vote condemned the conduct of the Commission. This was the first feather plucked from the popular party. Dr. Robertson now saw his principles clearly in the ascendant. Gillespie was a member of court,† and must have seen that sad havoc was about to be made of the conscientious scruples of the Dunfermline Presbytery. He was not left long in doubt.

The Assembly instantly proceeded to appoint the Presbytery of Dunfermline to meet at Inverkeithing, on the Thursday of that same week, for the admission of Mr. Richardson, ordered all the ministers to attend, appointed *five* ministers a *quorum* to execute the appointment, and required every member of the Presbytery to appear at the bar of the Assembly, on Friday at twelve o'clock, and give an account of his conduct. This was a peremptory and sweeping motion, and it was carried by 102 votes to 56. The temper of the House was apparent. They were resolved either to see their sentence obtemperated, or to punish the 'rebellious' Presbytery on the spot. There was to be no more dallying and pleading of conscience. Messengers had to leave summonses at the dwellings of the ministers; but they hastened across the Forth and passed on at the Assembly's commandment.

The most stringent part of the sentence was its fixing *five* ministers as a *quorum*. Three is the usual number,

\* Review of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, p. 11.

† Minutes of the Assembly, 1752.



but in this instance they insisted on a 'rigour beyond the law;' and the motive was too apparent not to be visible. Three members of Presbytery were willing to induct Mr. Richardson, and had the appointment run in the usual form, they would have executed the appointment, the others would have absented themselves, and the Presbytery would have escaped censure. Mr. Richardson would thus have slipped quietly into his benefice. The recusants, however, would not have been reached, and therefore the Assembly made a long arm, and so constructed their sentence that either some of them must bend to the authority of the Court, or the induction could not take place. By summoning the whole of them back to the bar of the Assembly on Friday, to account for their conduct, they secured to themselves the opportunity of sifting them, rebuking them, or instantly deposing them. If they did not yield, they thus compelled them to come in with the weapons of rebellion in their hands, and to abide the consequences.

From this sentence a great number of members dissented, as making a very material alteration in the constitution of the church; according to which *three* ministers were sufficient to constitute a Presbytery, as bringing the members of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, who had openly declared they could not with a good conscience concur in the settlement, under the unhappy necessity of disobeying an express appointment of the Assembly, and as preventing the admission of Mr. Richardson, seeing there were three ministers who were ready to admit him. They farther urged that he could have been admitted as in former cases by a Committee of the Assembly, without bearing hard upon the consciences of any. The extending of the quorum to five they state with pungency,—and its truth is its pungency,—'shows by the by, that the interest of Mr. Richardson was but a small part of the plan.\* The

\* Letter from a Gentleman in Edinburgh to a Friend in the Country, page 4, 1752.



sharpest darts, however, were now counted by the moderate party as stubble. They felt themselves well armed, and having the power they were resolved at all hazards to crush the popular agitators, and teach them that they must tamely submit to those in authority over them.

The Dunfermline Presbytery was called upon Friday. As might have been expected there had been no meeting of Presbytery, and Mr. Richardson had not been inducted. Three of the members of Presbytery, Messrs. Liston, Aberdour,—Bathgate, Dalgetty,—Thomson, Dunfermline, had been at Inverkeithing on Thursday, caused the bell to be rung, went to church, waited from 11 o'clock A.M. till 2 P.M., but could not proceed to execute the appointment of the Assembly, as there were only three of them. They were not a quorum. Messrs Stark, Torryburn, and Stark, Kinross, had also been at Inverkeithing on Thursday, but they had taken care to keep out of the way of the other three brethren, and as they found the people in a state of great excitement, they did not venture to take any hand in the settlement. Before the bar of the Assembly, Stark of Kinross gave in his submission to the authority of the Court. 'As he was sensible of the straits of his brethren, and of the bad effects of disobeying the authority of the Church, he was willing to expose himself to all hazards, and concur with the other three brethren who had shown their readiness in obeying the Assembly's appointment, in case it should be thought proper to renew it.'\* Pretty language to use about ordaining a minister! Six of the members of Presbytery with the terrors of deposition before them, still refused to take any active hand in the settlement, and gave in a humble representation to the Assembly stating their difficulties, the scriptural grounds on which they were acting, and declaring, that 'as honest men they were willing to forego every secular advantage for the sake of a good conscience.' The document, which we here insert, will be found throughout respectful, unimpassioned and firm.

\* Anti-patronage Report. Appendix, p. 70.

Unto the very Reverend, The Moderator, and the Reverend and Honourable Members of the Venerable Assembly of the Church of Scotland, met at Edinburgh, May 1752: The humble Representation of the Ministers of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, whose names are hereunto subjoined.

‘ We cannot but be deeply affected with our present situation, in being obliged to stand at the bar of this venerable Assembly, to answer for non-compliance with any of their appointments.

‘ But as this venerable Court is so good as to allow us to speak in our own behalf, we shall, therefore, beg leave humbly to represent some of those things which have all along straitened us in the execution of the orders we received, and which still lay such difficulties in our way, as we are not able to surmount: and this we hope to do with that plainness and honesty, and at the same time with that decent and dutiful respect to the supreme judicatory of this Church, which it is so justly entitled to expect from us.

‘ We need scarce observe, how unjustly we have been represented, as having no other difficulty, but the unreasonable fear of opposing the ill-grounded prejudices of our people.

‘ Nor need we inform this house, that ever since the act restoring patronages, in the end of Queen Anne’s reign, there has been a vehement opposition to all settlements by presentations, where there was but a small concurrence;\* which settlements have already produced a train of the most unhappy consequences, greatly affecting the interest of religion; and, if turned into the stated and fixed rule of procedure, will, in all probability, be attended with every fatal effect. Now, under such a view and apprehension as this, was it any wonder, or was it

\* That is, very few in the parish who could be brought to attend on the ministry of the presentee, or to be willing to have him for their pastor.

inconsistent with that obedience which we owe to our earthly superiors *in the Lord*, that we should demur and stop short in carrying a settlement into execution, where, in our apprehension, there was by no means such a concurrence of persons residing in the parish, as might give sufficient weight and influence for promoting the great ends of the ministry?

‘The Assembly know well, that it appears from their own acts and resolutions, entered into their records, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this Church, not to say as inconsistent with our Union settlement.

‘And we find it declared, Act 25th of May 1736, “that it is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this Church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish, contrary to the will of the congregation; and therefore it is seriously recommended, by the said act, to all judicatories of this Church, to have a due regard to the said principle in planting vacant congregations,—so as none be intruded into such parishes, as they regard the glory of God, and the edification of the body of Christ:” which recommendation, we humbly apprehend, to be strongly supported by the principles of reason, and the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ.

‘And we must be permitted to say, that after repeated endeavours used by committees of the Presbytery, to lessen the opposition to Mr. Richardson in the parish of Inverkeithing, matters still remain in such a situation, that we are brought to this unhappy dilemma, either of coming under the imputation of disobedience to a particular order of our ecclesiastical superiors, or contributing our part to the establishment of measures, which we can neither reconcile with the declared principles, nor with the true interest of this Church.

‘On the whole, we cannot help thinking, that, by having an active hand in carrying Mr. Richardson’s settlement into execution, we should as matters now stand, have been the unhappy instruments, to speak in the language

of holy writ, of scattering the flock of Christ ; not to mention what may be the fatal consequences of such settlements to our happy civil constitution.

‘ If the venerable Assembly shall, on this account, judge us guilty of such criminal disobedience, as to deserve their censures, we trust they will, at least, allow that we have acted as honest men, willing to forego every secular advantage for conscience sake.

‘ In such an event, this, through grace, shall be our support, that not being charged with any neglect of the duties of our ministry among those committed to our care, we are to suffer for adhering to what we apprehend to be the will of our great Lord and Master,—whose we are, whom we are bound to serve in all things, and on whom we cast all our care. Signed by ROBERT STARK, DAVID HUNTER, THOMAS GILLESPIE, ALEX. DALING, THOMAS FERNIE, and JOHN SPENCE; and dated, Edinburgh, 22d May, 1752.’\*

After their paper was read, the Moderator recommended them to consider their situation, and implored them to take advantage of the opportunity which they still had of saving themselves from the displeasure of the Church. The Assembly expected they would have yielded, and sacrificed their consciences at the dictates of human authority. They however uttered not a word. Parties being removed, a debate ensued. The panels at the bar—for so they must now be called—had given ample cause to provoke discussion on the part of their opponents. They had not resiled one hair’s breadth from the great principles which they had all along maintained, that the obedience which they owed to their superiors was ‘in the Lord,’—that ‘patronage was a national calamity,’—that by the ‘laws of the Church and of the Lord Jesus Christ, no minister was to be intruded upon a people,’—that ‘they would take no active part in Mr. Richardson’s induction,’—that they were willing to suffer ‘for the sake of a good conscience,’ and that amid their present trials they were supported by the

\* A Letter from a Gentleman in Edinburgh to his Friend in the Country, pp. 5—7. 1752.

conviction that 'they had not neglected the duties of their ministry.' The great majority of the old and venerable ministers in the Assembly who had any name for religion spoke in their behalf; but the younger ministers, who are hit off in Wotherspoon's 'Characteristics' as destitute of religion, and aping the man of fashion were all violent against them. It would have been too much however to have deposed them all. Popular indignation would have burst out against the Assembly, and six would have formed the nucleus of another Secession, as numerous and powerful as that of the Erskines. Their aim was to strike quick—to strike safely for the Church—and to strike terror into the heart of all. At length it was carried that *one* out of the six should be *deposed*. They separated without determining which of the six should be sacrificed, and without indicating any probable judgment about the fate of the other five. This was a piece of refined cruelty. It was designed to serve a purpose, and break their spirits. Every one of the six during the night felt the sentence of deposition lying heavy upon his heart, and visiting his flock and family.

Next day they were called in, not together, but one by one, and asked if they had any thing to offer in the way of explanation or retractation. If they had come in together they would have sustained each other and acted as one body. The policy was, divide and conquer. The plan in part succeeded, though not to the extent which was wished. Stark, Fernie, and Hunter all shifted their ground a little, and intimated more or less that there was a prospect in altered circumstances, and in an increased concurrence at Inverkeithing, of their giving their countenance to the induction. Their consciences were evidently yielding. Where there is a wish there will be found a way. Messrs. Daling and Spence would say nothing, and continued firm, neither provoking anger nor beseeching favour. Last of all came Mr. Gillespie. Instead of feeling any misgivings, he had prepared himself with fresh arguments. As they were avowedly *Constitutionalists*, he drew an arrow from the

quiver of the Constitution, and galled them by a reference to the minutes of the Church herself. He read to them the following paper,—

‘Unto the Very Reverend, The Moderator, and the Reverend and Honourable Members of the Venerable Assembly of the Church of Scotland, met at Edinburgh, May 1752: The humble Representation of Thomas Gillespie, Minister of the Gospel at Carnock.

‘That whereas, in the representation given in to the General Assembly yesterday, it was set forth amongst other things, “that it appears from their own acts and resolutions entered into their records, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this Church, not to say inconsistent with our Union settlement:” and whereas this paragraph expressed, as it is apprehended, in the softest terms, was considered by some members as an aggravation of our non-compliance with their order: I humbly beg leave to lay before this house, a paragraph or two taken from a paper entitled, “The Grounds of the Claim of the Church of Scotland for the Redress of the Grievance of Patronage, entered into the Records of the Assembly on the 22d of May 1736.” There, after representing the laws respecting our Church, the Assembly will find these remarkable words, “that notwithstanding the security of this our happy establishment in all its parts was as great and solemn as it was possible for human laws and constitutions to devise or execute; yet in prejudice of that security, as we apprehend, the act in the tenth year of Queen Anne was passed, restoring to patrons the power of presenting, &c.” And the said paper concludes with these words, “that this grievance was brought upon us contrary to the establishment of this Church made at the glorious Revolution, and solemnly confirmed and secured, as an essential condition of the Union of the two kingdoms.” It is now submitted, if we have offended by saying as above, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to the Church, not to say inconsistent



with our Union settlement. And I humbly crave, that the whole of the foresaid grounds of claim may be read, and that this my representation may be entered into the records of Court, or kept *in retentis* with other papers.

(Signed) 'THOMAS GILLESPIE.'

The paper was not received. It was neither put on record nor kept *in retentis*. The Assembly were not in such a temper of mind as to discuss the matter afresh and modify their judgment. Nor did they read the 'grounds of claim' as he craved at their hand. That the reader may know what this 'ground of claim' from patronage was which Gillespie wished read, and which they refused, it is proper to mention that it was prepared at the meeting of the Assembly 1736, as already noticed, when an attempt was made to propitiate the Seceders; and as it had been drawn up, according to Sir Harry Moncrieff, in bad faith, the reference to it at the bar of the Assembly could be any thing but pleasing. It was touching the flesh spot which was still raw and tender. In his defence Gillespie kept to constitutional ground. He pled before the Assembly, that the Assembly itself had declared that patronage was a grievance inconsistent with the Union settlement, and the constitution of the Church of Scotland. He referred to the very same paper, and employed the same arguments which the Non-intrusionists employed before the late disruption. Single-handed he drew his arrows from the same quiver. He galled the leaders of the Church by reminding them what the Church herself had declared. Men's anger is usually in proportion to the weakness of their cause. Some very severe reflections, therefore, were made upon him in court for presuming to vindicate his conduct, and especially for doing it in the manner he had done. Without the walls of the Assembly-house it had been openly said, that the sentence of deposition would fall on Mr. Gillespie, and it soon became apparent that to beard the lion in his den, even with the weapons of truth and righteousness, was the certain way of becoming his prey.

Before the last act in the tragedy, which had been hurried on through its different stages with unprecedented speed, the Assembly—as is usual in cases of deposition, but which practice, considering the present temper of the House, would have been more honoured in the breach than observance—engaged in prayer, for the purpose of seeking light and direction whom they should depose. A few straggling votes came out for some of the others, but the great majority of those who voted gave their voice for the deposition of Gillespie. It was evident that many a heart quailed when it came to the point, for while 56 in all voted, and 52 of these voted against Mr. Gillespie, 102 declined giving any vote, so that it was only about a third part of the Assembly that actually cast him out of the Church. The others no doubt acquiesced, but 52 only joined in calling down fire from heaven to consume him, and it should in justice be added, that they were mostly lawyers, who were sitting at the time as elders in the House.

When Gillespie stood up to receive the sentence of deposition, there was in his deportment such Christian meekness, and at the same time such dignity arising from devoutness and conscious innocence, that even those who concurred in voting for his deposition could not help feeling a high esteem for him. ‘On this trying occasion, his mind was guided and encouraged by the words of his Saviour occurring vividly to his mind,—“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”’\*

Dr. Cuming pronounced from the chair the following sentence upon him. It was couched in very solemn words, and given forth in the sacred name of the blessed Saviour. ‘The General Assembly did, and hereby do, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ the sole King and Head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by him to them, depose Mr. Thomas Gillespie, minister at Carnock, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging him to exercise the same or any part thereof,

\* Christian Monitor, 11th vol. p. 669. Brown, Inverkeithing.

within this Church in all time coming: and the Assembly did and hereby do declare the church and parish of Carnock vacant, from and after the day and date of this sentence.'

This sentence Mr. Gillespie heard with the most becoming gravity, and spoke as follows:—

'Moderator,—I desire to receive this sentence of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, pronounced against me, with real concern, and awful impressions of the Divine conduct in it: but I rejoice, that to me it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.'

This reply of Gillespie's had nothing of boasting mingled with it. He expressed himself with great gravity and with unassumed sincerity. A few members treated his reply with scorn, but a murmur at such an indecency ran through the House, and in different corners of it there was heard an involuntary burst of feeling getting the better of keen partisanship. 'Alas! the good man.'

When Mr. Gillespie withdrew from the bar, he was no longer a minister of the Establishment. Before he was arraigned, 'the Church of Scotland could boast of no member more honest and sincere—of no minister more pious and faithful, yet by an act of Church authority he was singled out as unworthy of her communion,'\* and stript of the office of the ministry.

The manner and despatch with which the whole affair was conducted were very remarkable. On Monday the Assembly gave out the appointment for the induction of Mr. Richardson. Thursday was the day fixed for the settlement. On Friday the whole Presbytery were enjoined to appear at the bar and report of their obedience. Gillespie disobeyed the appointment as to the induction, but he obeyed the summons and appeared in Court on Friday. On this day his trial, if it can be so called, began, and 'in the space of twenty-four hours, without a libel or any formal process, he was arraigned, cast, and condemned, merely

\* Letter, p. 11.

for non-compliance with a particular order of the Assembly, appointing him to have an active hand in carrying a sentence into execution, which in his apprehension he could not have done without disregarding the true interest, the constitution, and standing laws of the Church, and thus violating the solemn vows he had come under when he was admitted minister of Carnock.\* He had joined the Church of Scotland as a free Church, where he understood liberty of conscience 'in the Lord' to be recognised. His license and ordination among the English Dissenters had both been sustained. He had been allowed to subscribe the Confession with explanations about the power of the civil magistrate in religion. And now all these rights and liberties, by a single arbitrary enactment of the Assembly, were swept away, and he must be a passive instrument to execute the arbitrary sentences of others.

The sentence pronounced upon him, and the mode in which it was done, have been justly held to be painfully 'blasphemous.' It was pronounced after prayer to God—in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—by virtue of the power and authority which he had granted to the Assembly! And he was stript of his office as a minister, and cast out of his church, not for heresy or immorality, but because he would not violate the dictates of his conscience, in being active in forcing a minister according to the Patronage act, upon a reclaiming congregation. Bogue and Bennet, in their History of Dissenters, have said in their own vigorous way, 'All the blasphemies in the army and navy for twenty years past, have not equalled the profaneness of that one act of the General Assembly, composed of the ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland.'†

A man like Gillespie, who had been so conscientious in making his way to the ministry, and who had left when a student the hall of the Secession on account, it is said, of their close terms of communion, was not likely to submit his neck to a still more galling yoke. On the very day on

\* Erskine's Preface to Gillespie's Essay on Temptation, p. 5.

† Vol. iv. p. 68.

which he had been deposed, he left Edinburgh and returned to Carnock. He submitted to the sentence to its full extent. He readily renounced all the temporal emoluments arising from the legal Establishment. As he entered the gate leading to the manse, before which there was a little green plot of grass, his wife appeared at the door to welcome him, his first words were,—‘ I am no longer minister of Carnock.’ Her reply was short, pithy, and affectionate,—‘ Well, if we must beg, I will carry the *meal-pock*.’

In Carnock, Dunfermline, and in all the towns and villages on the banks of the Forth, the news spread with the quickness of a post. Public indignation was excited to the utmost. An immense concourse of people assembled on the Sabbath morning at Carnock. A person who was cognisant of all the circumstances, and who published the ‘letter’ the week following which we have already more than once quoted, says: ‘ He would not so much as preach last Lord’s day in the church of Carnock, nor allow the bell to be rung, but repaired to the open fields: and having chosen for his text the words of the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. ix. 16. “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, wo is unto me if I preach not the gospel,” he told his hearers, that though the Assembly had deposed him from being a minister in the Established Church, for not doing what he believed it was sinful for him to do; yet he hoped, through grace, no public dispute should be his theme, but Jesus and him crucified: and desired, at all seasons, to have it in his eye, that “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:” and then went on to lay before them the great and important truths of the everlasting gospel, without one reflecting word on all that had past.’

Various conjectures have been made as to the cause why the Assembly concentrated their votes upon Gillespie, so that his deposition was all but unanimous on the part of those who had courage or temerity to vote. It has often been said by very respectable authorities, that he was moderator of the Presbytery, and was appointed to preach at Inverkeithing, and having failed to do so, he was pun-

ished with marked severity for contempt of court. These things are mere fictions. Mr. Spence of Orwell was moderator, and was appointed to preach. Mr. Gillespie had no service whatever assigned him.

The minutes of the Assembly suggest the proper grounds. They state 'that by the deposition of Mr. Thomas Gillespie at Carnock, they not only have asserted the authority of this Supreme Court, but have inflicted upon him a censure adequate to repeated acts of disobedience, *adhered to tenaciously when at the bar.*' His second paper therefore drew upon him the vengeance of the Court. No man signed it but himself. In it he says, 'that whereas the representation of yesterday had given offence, by stating patronage was considered a grievance to the Church,' he returns to the charge, and ventures single-handed to reiterate it, and therefore he is marked out and borne down by the phalanx as the most obstinate offender.

The other offenders belonging to the Presbytery of Dunfermline were involved in the same transgression, but they had not the same sternness of principle as Gillespie. Some of them, such as Fernie of Dunfermline, merely feared the people. The Assembly, therefore, 'being desirous to mix mercy and lenity with their judgment' (as they phrase it), renewed upon the Presbytery the injunction of admitting Mr. Richardson, and empowered the Synod of Fife to consider the excuses of those who did not attend, and if not satisfied therewith, enjoined their suspension 'from the exercise of their offices in all Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, aye, and until they shall respectively testify their sorrow for their disobedience to its acts and ordinances.\*' Only three of all the Presbytery stood firmly out to the last, and refused either by deeds or words to yield submission. 'Messrs. *Spence* of Orwell, *Hunter* of Saline, and *Daling* of Cleish, were in consequence of the Assembly's sentence *ipso facto* suspended from their judicial functions in all Church courts, except their own sessions.'

\* General Assembly Minute.



and under this sentence they remained until the year 1765 (a period of thirteen years), when the Assembly, taking the alarm at the spread of schism in the Church, removed the sentence of suspension, and reposed them 'to their former judicative capacity.'\* Fear led to this relaxation of rigour.

The constitutional party in the Assembly, by these decisions against Gillespie and his co-presbyters, obtained a complete triumph over their opponents. It was now determined that the Church of Scotland henceforward was to be governed on the two following principles:—1st, 'That as PATRONAGE is the law of the land, the courts of a national Church established and protected by law and all the individual ministers of that Church, are bound, in as far as it depends upon exertions arising from the duties of their place, to give it effect;—2d, That Church courts betrayed their duty to the constitution, when the spirit of their decisions or negligence in enforcing obedience to their orders, created unnecessary obstacles to the exercise of the right of patronage, and fostered in the minds of the people the false idea that they have a right to choose their own ministers, or even a negative upon the nomination of the patron.'† Patronage was now to be supported not merely as the existing law, but as the most expedient way of settling vacant parishes.

Professor Cuming the moderator was so much gratified with the decision of the Assembly, which crushed the disobedient Presbytery of Dunfermline, that he congratulated them in highly eulogistic terms for doing what 'his Majesty's Commissioner was pleased in his speech to recommend;' and that they had done 'something to strengthen that constitution which was settled in 1692.' In his own pompous way he proceeded: 'We are the ministers of the gospel of Christ—we are also ministers of a Church established by law, but a subordination of judicatories is established by law. If this is not preserved, we give up our constitution

\* Morren's Annals, vol. i. p. 308.

† Appendix, Stewart's Life of Robertson, p. 190.

and the legal advantages of it—we ourselves abandon that right we have by the articles of the Union. . . . It was therefore necessary that something should be done to maintain the authority of the Church. I know it will be a prejudice against what the Assembly have done, *that the argument was supported by several young members* (alluding to Robertson, Home, and others), but it was by young men in defence of our old constitution. The terms on which we became ministers of the Established Church are fixed and known, are approved and subscribed to by us. If the consciences of some cannot come up to these terms, which are thought essential to our constitution, they may be deprived of the legal advantages of the Church. God forbid that those who cannot come up to these terms are not good men, but this may be said that they are not good Presbyterians.\* Ah! it was in any thing but good taste thus to blow the trump of victory over a man who had been stripped of his benefice for the sake of a good conscience. If Gillespie was not a good Presbyterian, it was because he believed the laws of the Presbyterian Established Church were not consistent with the laws of Christ.

With the pious people throughout the Church of Scotland, the lamentation over the fate of Gillespie was loud and bitter. The friends of religious liberty were greatly alarmed. The Church was now indeed bound to the throne. Its chain consisted of three links, *pay, patronage, and passive obedience*. The second the Church had hitherto been able often to weaken, and at times disannul, and of course the third had usually fallen to the ground; but now the Church with her own hands and upon her own anvil had welded the link of patronage, and the chain was complete. In practice as well as in theory the thing was now considered perfect.

Whitefield saw with different eyes from the moderator of the Assembly. He knew what it was to be a minister of religion untrammelled. When he heard that the Assembly

\* Minutes of Assembly, 1752.

had deposed Mr. Gillespie, it called forth from him the hearty sarcastic remark,—‘I wish Mr. Gillespie joy. The POPE has turned *Presbyterian*. How blind is Satan! What does he get by casting out Christ’s servants? I expect great good will come out of these confusions. Mr. Gillespie will do more good in one week now than before in a year.’\* Whitefield well knew that to strike human nature roughly is the sure way to elicit the sparks which will kindle the flame.

The tactics pursued by the Assembly were considered according to human wisdom to be the best which could be followed for enforcing implicit obedience, and guarding against the rise of another new sect of Dissenters. The Church Courts had dallied with the Seceders for eight years before they had deposed them, and they had suffered them to increase from one to six before they were lopped off; so that they had both numbers and time to form a compact and powerful ecclesiastical body; but in this case the Assembly only cut off one, and cut him off at once, and naturally expected that he would be a warning to others, and die as he dropt upon the ground; but God can turn human wisdom into folly, for he was received into a very kindly soil,—the sympathies of the public. Though he was longer in putting forth his branches, and becoming a shelter to the oppressed, than if he had consorted from the first with others, yet he in due time convinced his persecutors that he was not a dead branch purged out of the Vine, but ‘the rod of an almond-tree’ in the hand of the High Priest, ‘budding, and blossoming, and bringing forth fruit.’

\* The Life and Times of Whitefield, p. 408.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ATTEMPT TO RESTORE GILLESPIE—ITS FAILURE—GILLESPIE A DISSENTER.

MR. Gillespie having been deposed from being a minister of the Established Church, was not thereby stripped of the office of the ministry. This he had received from the Dissenters in England, and on the foundation of the validity of their ordination he had been inducted into the parish of Carnock. From the moment he was ejected, he gave up all the civil privileges and emoluments which were connected with the civil Establishment. The place where he recommenced his labours as a Dissenting minister was in the church-yard of Carnock. An immense crowd of people as his sympathising hearers stood before him, on the sloping ground to the south of the church. As the church-yard was ecclesiastical ground, and his preaching there gave offence, he removed to a little holm near to the mill, but from this he was also compelled to remove. He was at length literally driven to the highway. At the back of the manse, on the public road, there was a patch of waste ground which lay uncultivated and unclaimed, and to this spot he removed his tent, and preached to an immense concourse of people during the whole of summer and harvest. It does not appear that he went about the country telling his wrongs, and hawking his sorrows; but humbly and quietly sustained himself with a good conscience, and kept himself to the faithful discharge of his ministerial duties. Public sympathy now gave double effect to the solemnity of his preaching. The summer was dry and warm, and his people without a Sabbath's intermission sat contentedly under the broad expanse of heaven.

The only meeting of Presbytery which Mr. Gillespie ever attended after his deposition, was one which was held at Dunfermline soon after the meeting of Assembly. All the extracts and deeds of Assembly, in his case, were then to be read, and given effect to. It is said to have been held in the Old Church,—once Ralph Erskine's. It was again the witness of arbitrary measures, similar to those which drove Ralph, after a long struggle, from the bosom of the Establishment. The Church was crowded. Mr. Gillespie's name was removed from the roll of Presbytery, and he made no effort to retain it. It would have been vain. As he rose to retire through the dense crowd, Thomson of Dunfermline, who had been his keenest foe, is reported to have cried out with heartless mockery, 'Make way there for the man with the strait-laced conscience.'

The friends of Gillespie throughout the Church of Scotland were not idle. Very active measures were taken to get the sentence of deposition removed at the next meeting of Assembly. They were convinced that the blow was aimed through him, at the popular or evangelical party, and that if they did not get his sentence set aside, the dominant party would either depose them too, or without any regard to the rules of the Church, exact a passive obedience to all their arbitrary commands. The progress of ecclesiastical severities was now exceedingly rapid. A short time ago, no Presbytery or minister was necessitated to be actively engaged in carrying forward a violent settlement, but now all must either take part in forcing a minister upon a reclaiming congregation, or be rebuked, suspended, or deposed according to the temper of the Assembly. Consciences guided by what was thought to be the word of God, and the constitution of the Church, were now either to be violated,—or valuable and useful men were to be deprived of their charges. It was come to this extremity, that the settlement of one minister by the strong arm of patronage might silence a whole Presbytery, and lay desolate all the churches within its bounds.

Those ministers who were the friends of scriptural liber-

ty and of popular rights, met at Linlithgow Bridge on the 23d of June, and again at Edinburgh on the 25th of the same month, with the view of devising and taking joint measures for having Gillespie restored,—the Dunfermline Presbytery vindicated, and matters in general put on such a footing, that congregations might have a voice in the election of their ministers, while members of Church Courts should not be compelled to take an active part in carrying into execution settlements which they conscientiously believed were unscriptural and contrary to the laws of the Church. Their intentions were good, and to a considerable extent they were vigorously acted on.

The usual appliances for awakening public attention to the threatened interests of the Church, and for strengthening the hands of office-bearers in the Church Courts were had recourse to. The pulpits were not silent. Prayers were made. The Press was employed to enlighten the the public mind, and to sound the tocsin of alarm. Both parties had recourse to it, and numerous pamphlets, which was then the favourite mode of carrying on a controversy, appeared, and obtained a wide circulation. The sympathies of the people were wholly with the friends of constitutional liberty, and were strongly set against the arbitrary measures, now forced, as they said, upon the Church by the judgment of a tyrannical Assembly.

Some of the best and ablest men that ever graced the Church of Scotland, such as Walker of Dundonald, Wotherpoon of Paisley, M'Laurin of Glasgow, Adams of Falkirk, and Webster of Edinburgh, devoted their pens and their energies to sustain and prolong the waning liberties of the Church of Scotland from utterly expiring. Events proved that with all their talents and worth they were unequal to the task.

Their cause was good. In applying the great principles of gospel liberty, and of constitutional law and practice to the case of Gillespie, they pointedly asked, if the Assembly had not arbitrarily violated a fundamental law in assuming a power to enlarge the *quorum* of the presby-



tery? If any inconvenience, they said, appeared in the paucity of *three* as fixed by the constitution, it belonged to the presbyteries regularly consulted to appoint the remedy. The Assembly had no right of itself to innovate in order to serve a particular purpose. Farther, there was something worse than this. The change of the quorum having been introduced after the recusant brethren had declared their scruples, it was evidently made on purpose to involve and expose them to censure, contrary to humanity and the principles of all rightly governed societies, which make laws to prevent and punish future crimes, but never with the view to ensnare individuals and punish crimes committed. Again, it was most despotic and unconstitutional to inflict censure on members who, in justification of their conduct, pled and adduced at the bar of the Assembly the acts and declarations of the Church not only not repealed, but at the very time, from aught that appeared to the contrary, approved of by the majority of the collective body: and lastly, it was asked, if Gillespie, whom they had deposed, had transgressed any law of Christ—or if it was not rather a law formed and imposed by men; and if it was a human law, ‘let it be made appear by what warrant and authority the censures of Christ’s government are inflicted; let it be made appear that it is not a most bold, daring, and impious prostitution of the censures of Christ’s church to denounce and inflict them in his name and authority on any but those who are disobedient to his express laws, and walk unworthy of him; let it be made appear *that it is not confounding two things totally distinct—the Church of Christ, and the Church established by law*; and stamping with his *sacred image* and superscription what alone ought to bear the image and superscription of *Cæsar*.’\* It was tenaciously held by Gillespie’s friends to be awfully impious that a minister should be deposed ‘in the name of Jesus and by his authority,—not for erroneous doctrine advanced or defended,—not for

\* An Inquiry into the powers of the General Assembly, (pp. 5, 6, 7,) by T. G——n. Letter in Scots Mag., 1752; p. 343, by the same.

want of piety, fidelity, or zeal,—not for any direct violation of his laws or institutions, but for disobeying a government order; and farther, that there was a mean creeping villany in it; for as the civil constitution had connected the benefice with the ministerial office, they had deposed him from the latter, that in terms of Law, though not of the New Testament, he might be stripped of the former—his stipend.' These were pungent accusations; and, if pushed to their fair conclusion, would have led to a separation between the popular party and all state-endowments.

The objections which the popular party were most diffculted to meet and to parry, were the two following: who is to interpret the laws of the church, and who must execute its sentences? The church had no higher court than the Assembly, and the Assembly alone was competent to do these things. The evangelical party shirked these questions, saying it must be a properly constituted Assembly. They did not give direct and explicit answers. This they were certain of, however, that the Assembly had laws which were its constitution; and according to these, and not by arbitrary appointments, she was to be governed. They looked to their congregations and presbyteries as the popular bodies which were to regulate and check the arbitrary and despotic procedure of the supreme legislative and executive Assembly; and they would not have been disappointed in their expectation had it not been for the outward magnetic influence which the State with its gold exercised; and which destroyed that balance of power which Christ had introduced into his kingdom, where all are brethren.

This is very pointedly referred to in one of the numerous pamphlets which Mr. Mc'Laurin published on the occasion. Says he, '*It is true, that by the laws of this land, a right to the public maintenance may depend upon the decisions of church judicatories.* But has not this circumstance (which I could easily show you is considered by the parliament itself only as a consequence of the thing) so absolutely engrossed the attention of many, and become so far the only object of their concern, that these affairs are frequently

decided not only without any regard to the *edification* of the people, but in a manner that must obviously and apparently tend to their spiritual *destruction*? And must this circumstance of a *benefice annexed to the cure of souls*, together with another which, indeed, I believe, must be added here, a number of lawyers being members of our supreme court, *make an essential alteration in the nature of our proceedings*, and change that *spiritual* government which Christ has instituted, and that *spiritual* power which he has given to his church for edification and not for destruction, into something merely *secular*, where *edification* is so far from being at all in view, that *spiritual destruction* is the known, the notour, and the experienced consequence? We have long carried on our proceedings in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in the awful sentence of deposing a minister out of his service. But if the influence of the gentlemen who commonly sit about the throne continues to prevail, it is high time for us to alter our style, or rather to let the civil judges decide all these matters, not in the New-kirk aisle, but on the other side of the Parliament-close.\*

Connected with those arbitrary proceedings which were openly laid to the charge of the government-section of the Assembly, and of which Gillespie's deposition was a flagrant instance, there was also said to be among the Moderates a great degree of coldness towards the King of Zion, and a negative departure from the doctrines of salvation by grace. They were supposed to be tinctured with the opinions of Hume and other sceptics, who then gave the tone to the polite and literary society of Edinburgh. It was to this view of the case that Wotherspoon directed his clear, keen, satirical pen, and produced 'The Ecclesiastical Characteristics,' in support of Gillespie, to which he was provoked by Hyndman's pamphlet in support of the Assembly which was 'written with the express purpose of representing the popular party as agitators of the people, and as in general

\* The Nature of Ecclesiastic Government, and of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland Illustrated.—Pp. 36, 37.

not acting upon conscience even when they pretend to it, but from a love of popularity.'\*

The object of Wotherspoon, in his well-known pamphlet, was to show how the character of a Moderate minister, at that time in repute in the Church of Scotland, might be attained. Among other rules, 'He is to consider all clergymen suspected of heresy as men of great genius; he is to screen and protect those who are charged with loose and immoral practices; to speak of the Confession of Faith with a sneer; to confine his preaching to social duties; ape the fine gentleman; lay aside all appearance of religion;' and, among other things, 'In church settlements, which are the principal causes that come before ministers for judgment, the only thing to be regarded is, who the patron and the great and noble heritors are for; the inclinations of the common people are to be utterly despised. Whenever a settlement is decided over the belly of the whole people in the parish, by a majority in the General Assembly, the victory should be improved by appointing some of the orthodox opposers of the settlement to execute it, especially those of them that pretend to have a scruple of conscience at having an active hand in any such settlement. As to the world in general, a moderate man is to have great charity for atheists and deists in principle, and for persons that are loose and vicious in their practice: but none at all for those that have a high profession of religion, and a great pretence to strictness in their walk and conversation.'† When Dr. Wotherspoon, nearly twenty years afterwards, defended his *Characteristics* in his 'Serious Apology for them,' he does not resile one iota from his charges, but reiterates and defends them at great length, both as 'to morality and doctrine.' The case of Gillespie throughout gives the edge to his satire.

President Edwards took the same view of the matter as Wotherspoon, and considered the deposition of his friend Mr. Gillespie as springing from a radical dislike of evan-

\* Apology for *Characteristics*, p. 13.

† Ecclesiastical *Characteristics*, Maxims 8, 10, 12.

gelical doctrine and pious ministers. The letter which he wrote to him when he heard of his deposition, breathes a truly tender and affectionate spirit. It was written in the midst of his own persecutions and annoyances, and he had a fellow-feeling for him as a stricken deer.

‘STOCKBRIDGE, 24<sup>th</sup> Nov., 1752.

‘REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,—In letters and pamphlets lately forwarded to me by some of my correspondents in Scotland, I have received the affecting and surprising account of your deposition, for not assisting in the settlement of Mr. Richardson at Inverkeithing. The circumstances of which affair seem to me to be such, as abundantly manifest your cause to be good; at the same time that they plainly show the persecuting spirit with which you have been proceeded against. It is strange that a Protestant church should condemn and depose one of her ministers for conscientiously declining to act in a forced settlement of a minister over a congregation that have not chosen him as their pastor, but are utterly averse to his ministrations, at least as to a stated attendance upon them. It is to be wondered at that such a Church at this time of day, after the cause of liberty in matters of conscience has been so abundantly defended, should arrogate to herself such a kind of authority over the consciences of both ministers and people, and use it in such a manner, by such severity, to establish that which is not only contrary to the liberty of Christians, wherewith Christ has made them free, but so directly contrary to her own principles, acts, and resolutions, entered on public record. The several steps of this proceeding, and some singular measures taken, and the hastiness and vehemence of the proceeding, are such as savour very strongly of the very spirit of persecution, and must be greatly to the dishonour of the Church of Scotland, and are such as will naturally engage the friends of God's people abroad in the world in your favour, as suffering very injuriously. It is wonderful that a church which has itself suffered so much by persecution should be guilty

of so much persecution. This proceeding gives reason to suspect that the Church of Scotland, which was once so famous, is not what it once was. It appears probable to me, at this distance, that there is something else at the bottom besides a zeal to uphold the authority of the church. Perhaps many of the clergy of the Church of Scotland have their minds secretly infected with those lax principles of the new divinity, and have imbibed the *liberal* doctrines, as they are accounted, which are 'so much in vogue at the present day, and so contrary to the strict, mysterious, spiritual, soul-humbling principles of our forefathers. I have observed, that these modern, fashionable opinions, however called noble and liberal, are commonly not only attended with a haughty contempt, but an inward malignant bitterness of heart, toward all the zealous professors and defenders of the contrary spiritual principles that do so nearly concern the vitals of religion and the power of experimental godliness.'

While the greatest and best of the Ministers of religion, both in Scotland and America, were thus taking a deep interest in the case of Gillespie, and striving for what they considered the old free constitution of the Church of Scotland, the Elders were not a-wanting in striving together for the same ends. In the month of August, they addressed a letter to their brethren in the eldership, who were 'lovers of peace and moderation,' as they were themselves, and forcibly drew their attention to the danger in which the Church of Christ among them was then placed. 'Things,' said they, 'are at this day come to that pass,—that ministers are like to be deposed for not acting contrary to their own consciences, and to the standing laws and rules of this Church. Too many who behold these things with concern, do not act the part they are called to; but spend their time in slothful desponding complaints, or reflecting upon the conduct of particular persons, or perhaps separate from this Church altogether. Instead of such courses, we entreat you brethren to consider what is your duty; for if there is anything which God hath put in your power, that



may be effectual to put a stop to the severe destructive measures set on foot, and to support the interests of religion in this land, we hope you will reckon yourselves under the strongest obligations not to neglect it. And we cannot help thinking that you are now loudly called on to exert yourselves; and we have no doubt but ye may be highly useful. We beseech you, therefore, in the bowels of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to sit still with folded hands and see our ruin. 'Tis yet in your power under God to prevent it; and if you refuse your help at this critical time, we must be allowed to tell you that a great part of the guilt of what may follow will lie at your door; and your reproaching others as the more immediate causes of it, will be far from justifying you in his sight who has entrusted you to be office-bearers in his Church. Remember it is the Kirk-sessions chiefly that make the Assemblies, and therefore if the Church shall be ruined by the choice of improper members of Assembly, we must repeat it again, because of its importance, the guilt in a great measure will lie on such of us elders as neglect our duty at this time.

'We beg leave therefore to put you in mind, that when the usual time comes of choosing a Presbytery elder, whether before or after the Synod, it is requisite, that being all convened, it be moved without delay, that a Presbytery elder be chosen for the ensuing half-year. In choosing this elder you ought, without respect of persons, to vote a man into office that is not only well qualified, but who will carefully attend all the meetings of Presbytery till May next. And it may be useful to enquire of him, from time to time, if he has attended. If you neglect such things you do nothing, and if you do them, you do all that is now in your power, except your prayers, which we hope will not be wanting.'

They further caution their brethren not to be deceived by the fair speeches of those who plead for the new severities, but to ask them if it is proper to maintain the authority of the Church by deposing ministers who act according to its constitution in the settlement of ministers; if there is no

difference between obedience on Protestant principles which is limited both by Scripture and the rules of the Church, and unlimited obedience to arbitrary enactments and mere human authority; also if new terms of ministerial communion are to be introduced by the Assembly, and not by the consent of the majority of Presbyteries; if multiplying depositions will supply vacancies, or if they think the Dunfermline Presbytery the only one capable of suffering for the sake of a good conscience; and besides, if these severities are not far more unreasonable now after the Secession than before it; and, lastly, if an attempt to starve ministers, since there is a parish poor law, will not fail of its intended effect, and make them more resolute than before.

By dwelling upon such points as these, they put facts and arguments into the minds and mouths of their brother elders, and stirred them up to act a firm and courageous part. It is worthy of remark that they did not excite them to follow factious proceedings, but simply exhorted them to choose representative elders for the Church courts 'who were circumspect in their walk, punctual in their attendance upon religious ordinances, strict in their observance of the Lord's day, and regular in keeping up the worship of God in their families.' To such elders they trusted for the rectification of all abuses. Because 'of the astonishing confidence of the chief ringleaders in the destructive severities,' they told them they ought not to be timorous and shy in preparing such men, and in opposing all who were not possessed of these qualifications. Ah! if they had but good conscientious men, and not toadies and sycophants to Government influence sitting around the foot of the throne, they did not fear the result.

Gillespie in the mean time was not flinching from the position he had taken, but was faithfully carrying on his weekly ministrations in the open air to immense crowds of attentive hearers, drawn from all the parishes, villages, and towns along the banks of the Forth. He was a man wondered at. The public mind was filled with commiseration

of him, and with indignation towards his persecutors and oppressors.

As winter approached, he and his congregation began to look out for a house in which to meet. Besides his own flock in Carnock, a number of most respectable persons in Dunfermline espoused his cause and approved of his principles. As this town, which was in his neighbourhood, was a place of wealth, of enlightened sentiments, and the town where the battle of religious liberty had been fought in the rise of the Secession, it was considered a very favourable spot for commencing a church. Ralph Erskine died, two months after Mr. Gillespie came to Dunfermline, and during the long vacancy of six years which followed, he got not a few of those as adherents who were fretted by repeated disappointments. Gillespie took possession of the old barn, fitted up for him as a place of worship, in the month of September, and continued to officiate in it to his former congregation (all his elders following him except one), as well as to those that gathered around him from Dunfermline and the neighbourhood.

As the spring approached, and the meeting of the General Assembly again drew near, his friends began to take active measures, and to concentrate their energies upon his case, so as to have it well represented before a properly constituted court. Overtures were presented to the Synods of Glasgow and Ayr, and of Lothian and Tweeddale, for transmission to the Assembly, bearing directly upon the case of Gillespie and the Dunfermline Presbytery. The general drift of the overtures and petitions of his friends was, that the Assembly should never interpose its authority to oblige ministers, under pain of deposition, to act in a settlement contrary to their conscience; that no minister should henceforth be deposed without a libel; that the Assembly should be pleased to take off the censures from Mr. Gillespie and the other brethren of the Dunfermline Presbytery, upon *a proper application being made by themselves*, and in a manner which might be consistent with the authority and peace of the Church. They also wished

it to be understood as an ecclesiastical arrangement, that persons should not accept of a patron's presentation, but allow the church to become vacant by *jure devoluto*; that the filling up of the vacancy would then devolve upon the Presbytery; that the Presbytery should first moderate a call among the heritors and elders, and then that the person chosen should be presented to the congregation for their assent. By some manœuvre of this kind, they wished to set aside the patron's right of presentation.

The overtures of the Moderate party were, on the other hand, condemnatory of all associations and public conventions for thwarting the decisions of the Assembly; and also of ministers introducing into their prayers matters of doubtful disputation; weakening the hands of their brethren by their public discourses; and using artifices to model and pack the Assembly, while they also called upon the Church to support the constitution, and maintain the honour and authority of its different courts.

It deserves to be mentioned, that in the overtures of Gillespie's friends, there was one little clause which was like the fly in the apothecary's pot of ointment,—they prayed for his restoration upon a 'proper application from himself.' Now an application he would not make. He had told his friends so. He was offended at the mention of it. He presented no petition. His congregation and his Presbytery petitioned for his restoration; but he was persuaded he had suffered wrong at the hands of the Assembly, and restitution he thought on their part was due to him. His own language was:—'The obedience and submission to which I stood bound by my subscription at my admission was, by the substance of the engagement, as well as the Divine authority, *limited* to be according to Scripture and the principles of the Church of Scotland. But by the mentioned sentence, absolute obedience to whatever the Assembly should appoint, right or wrong (as they are acknowledged to be fallible), was imposed upon me, and required of me under pain of censure; and a high censure was inflicted upon me, because I would not practise and come under the yoke of such illimited

blind obedience. Therefore, till submission and obedience were brought back to the former scriptural and Protestant limitation and channel, I could not with a safe conscience do any even the least and smallest thing in the way of application to Assembly, for being re-admitted a member of the Church. I leave it to you to judge, whether these are not good reasons for refusing what was demanded of me, and (whether) it was not unreasonable, if not cruel, to condemn me because I would (not) do it in contradiction to the plain dictates of my conscience declaring it sinful.\*

When the Assembly met in May, the popular party had decidedly the majority, and victory seemed certain. All the arbitrary measures of last year were on the eve of being swept away. The first trial of strength was in choosing a Moderator. The constitutionalists put upon the leet Principal Leechman of Glasgow, whose attainments, character, and office made him a person of great influence. The popular party voted for Mr. Alexander Webster, Edinburgh, who was a great friend of the Dunfermline Presbytery, of which he had once been a member, the personal acquaintance of Gillespie, the strong opponent of the Inverkeithing settlement, the most popular minister in the Church; and they carried their man and put him in the Moderator's chair. This was a triumph which struck dismay into the obsequious ranks which sat at the foot of the throne.

The Earl of Leven was Royal Commissioner. He was an excellent general, and knew well the authority with which he was armed. In rallying broken forces he knew that hints would not do. As his Majesty's Commissioner he spoke boldly out, and told the Assembly what as an Establishment was their line of duty. In a direct and authoritative speech from the throne, he laid down to them the most arbitrary maxims of Government, and crushed all the projects of the popular party for the restoration of Gillespie and the other members of the Dunfermline Presbytery.

\* Letter of Gillespie to Laupsley; see History of the Relief Church.



He addressed the Assembly in the following pointed manner:—‘The preservation, the welfare, and the honour of our happy constitution is, I know, so dear to you all, that I cannot but expect, that in the management of the important affairs which are to come under your consideration at this time, you will carefully observe, as you have hitherto done, a just medium betwixt an undue remission of your authority on the one hand, and unnecessary severities on the other. As all acts of severity are disagreeable, even when absolutely requisite for the good of society,—by such a due mixture of justice and mercy, you will act a consistent part worthy of yourselves, disappoint the hopes of your enemies, and give satisfaction to all your friends. How much soever you may have differed in your sentiments from one another, as to the expediency of interposing the authority of the Church *in a certain case*, in this all ought to agree, that since that authority has been interposed, it must, in consistency with the established rules of society, be supported; for whatever is fixed by a majority, becomes the common concern of each member to support, (although against his own private opinion,) as it is upon this foundation alone that society can subsist. But I shall sincerely rejoice if the acknowledgment and submission of that offending brother can pave the way for his being again received, consistently with your honour, into the bosom of the Church.’

When the case of Gillespie and the other brethren suspended from their judicative capacity came on, much interest was felt as to the result; but alas! a considerable number of the trimmers had withdrawn, and the popular party, who had the majority in the House, suffered the constitutionalists to carry their measure, and win the smile of the Royal Commissioner. Several overtures were read from Synods and Presbyteries, embodying a revocation of the sentence of last Assembly.

In discussing the merits of the case, the Assembly kept their eye primarily fixed upon the condition prescribed by the Earl of Leven,—‘the acknowledgment and submission



of that offending brother (to) pave the way for his being restored.' The Moderator was particularly desired to inquire if there was any application lodged, either in court or with any member, for the condemned brethren of the Dunfermline Presbytery being reponed. Dr. Erskine said something on behalf of Hunter, Daling, and Spence, which was not considered satisfactory, but not a syllable was said in reference to Gillespie, either as to his acknowledgment of guilt or his wish to be reponed. A long debate followed on the question, whether he should be reponed or not.

The constitutional party contended strenuously for supporting the authority of the Church, pleading that he must make an acknowledgment of his guilt,—and that by getting a meeting-house erected for himself, preaching after his deposition, and baptizing children belonging to persons from other parishes without proper certificates from their ministers, he had evidently given up all thoughts of reuniting himself with the Church of Scotland. The popular party, on the other hand, dwelt upon the unconstitutional nature of his sentence, the illegality of his trial, and the persecution he was suffering for the sake of conscience. They insisted it was monstrous to require a man to confess his guilt, when he declared that what he was doing was according to the word of God. They endeavoured to take off the edge of his apparent rebellion in preaching, by pointing the attention of the Assembly to the nature of the sentence passed upon him, which in some measure allowed it; ter, while the Assembly had deposed him in the name of the Lord Jesus, yet in a subsequent clause they deposed him merely from the exercise of the ministry 'in this Church,' by which was to be understood the Church of Scotland. His baptizing of children from the parishes of other ministers without certificates, they did not consider schismatical, but in strict accordance with the old and liberal constitution of the Church, which allowed of such freedom of communion in sealing ordinances. They also urged, that the reponing of Gillespie would prevent the growth of the Secession, and the *rise of a new schism* in the Church.

After the case had been debated at great length, the question was put,—*repone* or *not*. By *repone*, however, was not meant restoring him to his charge, but to the exercise of his office as a minister of the Church of Scotland, and a capacity of a call to a parish; and by *not repone*, that it should be open to Mr. Gillespie to apply when he pleased to the Assembly for his being restored to his office as a minister. It carried *not* by a majority of *three*. At next sederunt a motion was again made, that the Commission be empowered to take in Mr. Gillespie's case, and give judgment upon it, upon application from him signifying that it is his earnest desire to be reponed, and that he would esteem it a privilege. This motion, however, the Assembly would not entertain, as it would have removed the thing under the quiet eye of the Commission, and would have cast dishonour upon the vote of the Assembly on the preceding day. It was refused by a majority of three or four. Both numbers are given.

This was a very unexpected issue. Where was now the result of a whole year's agitation and of a popularly constituted Assembly, which had easily carried the election of the Moderator, and which could have easily reversed all that had been formerly done? Gillespie says in his letter already quoted, 'that they had a majority of ten or twelve—that they broke among themselves—their measures were disconcerted, and that some of them owned the hand of God in it, as they might have carried any thing.' No doubt there was an overruling Providence in the matter, but this neither exculpated false and trimming friends, nor could it prevent persons from saying that in the eyes of such the *throne* was higher than the *Bible* lying before the face of the Moderator.

The sentence of the former Assembly was again confirmed, and Gillespie was left to apply for admission when he saw proper. The judgment was cold as iron and sharp as steel. It was innocuous however to him. 'The maintaining,' said he, 'of the honour of the Assembly of 1752, and the authority of the Church, are quite inconsistent with

the due support of the glorious cause for which I suffered, and if the first stands the last is let fall to the ground.'\* The arbitrary authority of the Church courts was now supported. The moderate party were firmly seated in power. The popular party were after this broken and scattered, and tamely laid the rights and liberties of ministers and of the people at the feet of royalty. Since that time, the venerable and republican constitution of the Church of Scotland has been in ruins, and liberty has found a shelter and resting-place in what have been often sarcastically called the conventicles of Dissenters!

Gillespie immediately proceeded to reconstitute his session, and to appoint them to take the oversight of the congregation, which he instituted apart from the Church of Scotland, and to which he dispensed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper for the first time on the 29th of July 1753.

It is often said by Churchmen, that Gillespie was a Dissenter against his will, and that he would gladly have continued in connection with the Church of Scotland. In one acceptation this is true, but it is not true in the acceptation in which it is usually put forward. He had his own ideas of what he thought the Church of Scotland should be, and what he understood her constitution really was when received within her pale, as a dissenting minister from England, but he had no idea of continuing in connection with her, when her arbitrary enactments as an Establishment were fairly worked out and applied. He held strenuously, 'that a sinful term of communion had been imposed upon him by the Assembly of 1752, in requiring him to act in direct opposition and contradiction to Scripture—the known Established principles of the Church of Scotland—the dictates of his own mind,' and in deposing him because he would not comply. He had joined the Church, testifying against the power of the Civil Magistrate in religious matters, as laid down in the Confession of Faith. His obedience to Church courts he considered 'as limited

\* Letter to Laupsley.

by the word of God and his own conscience.' He considered patronage as 'antichristian,'—'all persecution as sinful,' and 'the kingdom of Christ as totally distinct from the kingdoms of this world.' Nay, the party in the Church with whom he acted, went even so far as to consider 'a civil Establishment, and the annexing to it of civil emoluments, a mere State arrangement, no way essentially connected with a gospel church, and that to inflict ecclesiastical censures upon ministers who would not carry out a mere State arrangement, was stamping with the image of Christ what should bear the image and superscription of Cæsar.' If Gillespie had gotten these points granted him, he would have sought connection with the Church of Scotland again; but, what in that case would have remained of the Establishment but the name? Till he obtained the limitations which he wished about the power of Church courts, he could 'not apply for admission with a safe conscience;' and as the power of the State-church was never relaxed, neither did he ever again seek connection with it.

It is difficult to determine what plan Mr. Gillespie had marked out for himself, when he constituted a church and began to dispense religious ordinances. His design was to maintain Christian liberty in opposition to Church despotism; but how he was to do this he had not made up his mind, farther than that he would not seek connection with the Church of Scotland, which was now become so arbitrary in its proceedings. He laid down this principle, 'that the authority of the Church was quite inconsistent with the glorious cause for which he suffered; and if the first stands, the last is let fall to the ground.' He therefore resolved to stand alone, and maintain the liberty of 'the Church of God which he had purchased with his blood.'

His having been ordained in connection with the Independent churches in England, would partly pave the way for his anomalous position. Though he was at one time 'a little tinctured with Independent principles, yet he afterwards heartily approved of the Presbyterian scheme,'

and it does not appear that he ever mooted joining the English Independents. He was evidently a very moderate Presbyterian, and wished Church courts rather to be consultative meetings, where a considerable latitude of opinion was allowed, than legislative and authoritative judicatories. It is remarkable that his descendants kept very steadfast to his example, and that the authority of the Relief Synod has ever been mild and lenient, even to a fault.

The liberality of Gillespie's principles as to church communion, was very different from the close sectarian principles, which were then finding favour throughout the country. When he proceeded to dispense the Lord's Supper, he took as his motto this truly Christian sentiment,—‘I hold communion with all that visibly hold the Head, and with such only.’ He did not excommunicate the Seceders or the Independents, or even the Church of Scotland that cast him out, but kept without bigotry to this safe, simple, and scriptural principle. Such was the term of communion which he stated the Saturday before the tokens were distributed.

In these liberal views he had probably been indoctrinated in England, confirmed by Whitefield, of whom he was a sincere admirer, and countenanced by many of the popular leaders at that time in the Church of Scotland. Open communion among the Protestant churches was the old doctrine of the Reformation, and close communion was one of the novelties which a worse state of things was beginning to introduce. ‘After the Reformation, *ministerial communion* was in almost universal practice among Protestant churches, and in England and Scotland as much as in any other country. One of the first controversies about *Christian communion*, was created by the English exiles at Frankfort in Queen Mary's time, who endeavoured to exclude from their communion all who were unwilling to adopt the English service-book. They contended for it with as much pertinacity as if it had received the sanction of Christ and his apostles, though it had been then very recently altered and new-modelled by Edward VI., who was

just dead. What is remarkable, they applied to John Calvin for his advice, which they did not follow,—and for his sanction, which they did not obtain.\*

Gillespie applied to his old friends in the Establishment for ministerial aid in dispensing the Lord's Supper. He did not obtain it however. From his letter to Laupsley it appears that, from the very first, they had made up their minds 'not to assist or employ him while he was under a sentence of deposition; and though he denounced it as what would provoke the displeasure of God,' they had more dread of the displeasure of the Assembly than of his denunciation. Being denied by his old friends in the Church, it does not appear he asked aid from any other quarter.† To whom else could he have gone? The Seceders were bound up by their terms of communion adopted very unfortunately at their disruption with Whitefield, so that they could not aid him. The English Dissenters were at a great distance. With the Glassites or Cameronians the attempt would have been vain, as their communion-table was fenced round with many peculiarities which compelled them to dwell alone. He, therefore, took the whole labour of a sacramental solemnity upon his own shoulders, and preached all the usual sermons on Thursday, Saturday, Sabbath, and Monday. He had asked the prayers of God's people to be earnest at a throne of grace in his behalf; and he felt, to his comfortable experience, that His grace was sufficient for him.

It was true what Whitefield said at his deposition,—it

\* Dr. Erskine's Life, p. 137. Appendix, p. 504.

† Church writers usually strive to represent Mr. Gillespie as a Churchman, because he asked aid of Church ministers. His catholic principles did not prevent him from doing it. Many of them pretended to hold the same principles for which he suffered; but they either wanted honesty or fortitude to make common cause with an old friend in the time of need. Gillespie was not insensible to the treatment which he received from the popular party; and, therefore, when speaking one day in a sermon concerning the usage which he had received from both sides of the Church, he said with emotion,—'I think I can say at my leisure, what David said in his haste,—all men are liars.'



brought him into notice. He who had formerly been a retired country minister, was now an object of universal sympathy and regard. His church was crowded. Several of the most respectable persons in Dunfermline joined it. Persons came from a distance to hear him, gave him their countenance, and sustained him in his struggle for Christian liberty, and the doctrines of salvation by grace to which he was sincerely attached. 'Crowds of serious persons flocked to his communion from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and various other quarters, at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper ;'\* and as it was according to his principles to give and receive testimonials of character for occasional fellowship from the Establishment and other Christian churches, his sacraments were literally seasons of love among the genuine followers of Christ, though they differed from each other about the lesser matters of forms and church order. John Erskine says, 'he took the whole service upon himself, which he did thirteen times in about five or six years, preaching every time no less than nine sermons, and exhorting seven or eight tables, besides a variety of private work. This is the more surprising, as he esteemed it criminal to serve the Lord with that which cost him nothing ; and, therefore, even in this busy period, he continued as formerly, fully and distinctly to write all his sermons and exhortations at tables.'†

As Gillespie was very apt not to husband his strength in the table services, and to forget that he had the evening sermon awaiting him, his brother Robert, from Edinburgh, would often sit behind him and warn him to spare himself. Such a caution was indispensable. His frame was not adequate to the labour of such continuous speaking. On one occasion he altogether broke down. His elders, however, brought him a little wine, cheered him on ; and, after a short pause, he finished his Herculean task. Such onerous services did not make him sacrifice the dictates of conscience, and the cause of religious liberty, at the shrine of

\* Quart. Mag.

† ' Erskine's Notice prefixed to Essay on Temptation.

bodily ease. He took no steps to be restored to the Church ; and it does not appear that any means were employed by the popular party during these years to have the sentence of deposition removed from off him.

In the midst of Christian brethren he stood alone ; with some an object of pity, and with others, of scorn. In the hand of God he was a sign to the people. The fact of Gillespie standing six years alone, and supporting the cause of Christ in every respect with great respectability and increasing usefulness, served at the time a purpose in the divine economy, which has never been sufficiently noticed or prized. Dissent was in a great measure new in Scotland. It was scarcely believed by any that the church could exist without the aid of the State. The Seceders had indeed existed more than twenty years. But then, they had come off from the church a numerous body at once. The Erskines and Wilson and Moncrieff were no ordinary men. Several of their congregations, that had seceded with them, were among the largest and most respectable in Scotland. They were bound together by a solemn bond, which gave them, for a long time, such compactness and power, that it was impossible to discover from their history whether a single congregation could be self-sustaining without any foreign aid. But in the case of Gillespie the delusion of leaning upon any aid whatever, whether civil or ecclesiastical, was effectually dispelled. The church of Christ in his small congregation was seen resting simply upon the Rock of ages. He had scarcely the ordinary measure of this world's policy. He was guileless as a child. His talents and acquirements were very respectable ; but they were not of the very highest order. He was not a man of bustle. He shunned notoriety. He was no political intriguer. He had never entered deeply into ecclesiastical business. He was neither wealthy nor connected with the great. His Meeting-house was mean ; his congregation a few farmers, cottagers, and servants, from the country, with a sprinkling of pious and respectable families from Dunfermline. In these untoward circumstances he yet had confi-

dence, in the face of ecclesiastical authority and of a frowning royal commissioner, to set up his *tent* and preach the gospel by the way-side; and abundant success crowned his labours. His eye was single. He was zealous and faithful. He spent himself for the good of souls. He wrestled for the liberty and purity of Zion; and the Lord gathered friends around him, and he lacked nothing. When deposed, he had even refused to take the current half-year's stipend, because he had not fully laboured for it, but the people did not permit him to suffer loss, because of his scrupulous honesty. His lack was amply supplied. His congregation voluntarily fixed his stipend at £600 Scots;\* allowing him also £60 Scots for a house, and otherwise consulting his comfort, and carrying on religious ordinances. At his summer sacraments the people would collect from £110 to £120 Scots. At that era these were large sums. The fountain of Christian benevolence required only to be struck, to flow copiously for his support. He was a striking example at the moment when such an example was needed, to teach the oppressed heritage of God, that they had the means of their deliverance in their own hand, and that they could both set up and support a gospel church, without covenants, acts of parliament, or state-endowments. When this lesson became perfectly apparent, assistance was graciously sent to Gillespie, and from a quarter which, of all others, must have been to him the sweetest and most endearing. It was doubtless connected with many touching recollections.

\* A Pound Scots is equal to 1s. 8d. sterling.

## CHAPTER V.

### ACCESSION OF BOSTON AND COLIER.—FORMATION OF THE RELIEF PRESBYTERY.

THE Rev. Thomas Boston, Jedburgh, was the first accession to the standard of religious liberty, as planted and unfurled by Gillespie. His father was the Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick, author of the *Fourfold State*, and of many other theological works which will be read with avidity so long as a taste for religion is felt, and the English language continues to be understood. The father evidently nurtured his son to become a dissenter; and he himself, as to his religious opinions, was in many respects the child of Divine guidance, and in nothing more than in his liberal and enlightened opinions as to ecclesiastical government. The facts are interesting, and show how we are insensibly moulded by the unseen hand of God.

Boston, senior, was a native of the town of Dunse. When very young, he learned what it was to be imprisoned for religion; and the lesson seems not to have been lost upon him, as he retained, during the whole of his life, a strong abhorrence of all arbitrary and persecuting measures in support of religion. 'My father,' says he, 'being a nonconformist during the time of Prelacy, he suffered on that head to imprisonment and spoiling of his goods. When I was a little boy, I lay in the prison of Dunse with him to keep him company; the which I have often looked on as an earnest of what might be abiding me; but hitherto I have not had that trial. My mother once paying to one Alexander Martin, sheriff-depute, the sum of £50 Scots, as the fine of her imprisoned husband for his nonconformity,

desired of him an abatement; whereupon, he taking up a pint stoup standing on the table, therewith broke in pieces a part of a tobacco-pipe lying thereon, bidding the devil beat him as small as that pipe-stopple, if there should be any abatement of the sum.\* A child reared in these circumstances could scarcely but tremble for the exercise of all civil power connected with the kingdom of Christ.

The Revolution, under William, Prince of Orange, 1688, swept away Prelacy, and re-established in Scotland the presbyterian form of church government. Boston, after many outward trials and inward struggles which were greatly sanctified to him, was licensed to preach the gospel in connection with the Establishment, 1697; was first ordained in the parish of Simprin, 1699; and was afterwards, in 1707, translated to Ettrick, where he died, 1732. He belonged from principle to the orthodox and popular side of the church, and was greatly borne down by the dominant and high-flying Establishment party, who were as jealous of his ultra liberalism as they were of his supposed ultra views of sovereign grace, which they, at a meeting of Assembly during the Marrow controversy, condemned as Antinomian.

His views certainly squared very ill with the doctrine of an Establishment, though he was a member and minister of it. He believed that 'the Lord Jesus was the only King and Head of his church; that the kingdom of Christ was a kingdom within a kingdom; a spiritual kingdom distinct from, and independent of, the magistrate.'† 'Men may distinguish as they will, but as a body with more heads than one, is a monster in nature, the scripture is plain; the church is no such monster, Eph. iv. 4, 5. *one body*, one Lord.'‡ He did not merely object to the harsh exercise of patronage, but he considered it in every form antisciptural. 'I do believe, as I have all along from my youth, that the Christian people have of *divine* right the

\* Memoirs, p. 6.

† Memoirs, p. 282.

‡ Sermons on Communion, p. 143. Edn. 1752.

power of choosing their own pastors.’\* Like many other ministers of that period, he had ‘an undefined horror at separation, which led him to regard almost every other ecclesiastical evil as trifling;’ but he certainly looked forward to the time when the corrupt influence of a national church, along with the national church itself, though fondly clung to, should be removed. The artless and sincere confession of his heart is very striking: ‘The decay of love among the professors of Christianity is most visible at this day: and I must say I despair of seeing due love among church-members restored, as long as the church among us is so mixed with, and so little separated from the world, *and until the church be more distinguished from the nation, for as fond as we have been of a national church.* God separated them in the late times by the fire of persecution, and then this love flamed among them. Peace being restored, the church even mixed again with the world lying in wickedness, and that love died out of course.’† The principal source from which he received his light as to the evils of a national Establishment of religion, was his reading Fulwood’s Discourse on the Visible Church. ‘From that time,’ says he, ‘I had little fondness for national churches, strictly and properly so called, as of equal latitude with the nations,—and wished for an amendment of the constitutions of our own church as to the membership thereof.‡ The good man was thus groping his way out of all civil enactments on behalf of the church of Christ, and of persons claiming membership because they were parishioners.’

‘On Friday, April 3d, 1713, about eight minutes after one in the morning,’ says he in his diary, ‘my youngest son Thomas was born, and was baptized on the 14th by Mr. William Macghie, minister of Selkirk.’ He seems to have been very early brought under the influence of religion. ‘Having discovered something of his case to his mother,

\* The Mind of Thomas Boston on Patronage, p. 3.

† Sermons on Com., p. 158.

‡ Memoirs, p. 177.



while he was between six and seven years of age, I at her motion did converse with him thereon, and found him sensible of the inward corruption of his heart, whereupon I informed him, instructed him, and directed him in the whole case the best I could.' Thomas pursued his studies in the University of Edinburgh, much to the satisfaction of his Professors, and to the great delight of his father, made choice of the office of the ministry, as a situation in the Church of Christ which he was desirous to fill, as it opened up to him the prospect of much usefulness.

He was only about 19 years of age when his father died in 1732, and his course of theological study was not completed, but such was the desire of all parties that he should succeed his father, that he was licensed to preach the gospel earlier than the laws of the Church allowed, or his age would have warranted, but for his great attainments. When the youth stood up in the room of his revered sire, all hearts throbbed for the issue, and tears of joy were shed at the close of his sermon, because he was indeed a son worthy of succeeding such a father.

His gifts as a preacher soon won for him a distinguished reputation. Bogue of Gosport, who often heard him when he was in his prime, declared that next to Whitefield, Thomas Boston was the most commanding preacher he had ever heard. From the parish of Ettrick, he was after several years translated to Oxnam, which lay a few miles from Jedburgh, from which town many went every Sabbath to enjoy the benefit of his ministrations.

In the year 1751, the inhabitants of Dundee were very solicitous to obtain him as one of their ministers. The magistrates, however, had their favourite candidate, who was no favourite with the people. A call according to the rules of borough patronage was moderated on his behalf. A portion however of the Town Council, together with many heads of families, got up among themselves an irregular call for Boston; which they presented as a competing call in all the Church courts, till they brought it before the Assembly. There it was speedily cast out as being informal, and the

call of the magistrates was at once preferred. Boston was not of the party whom the Assembly delighted to advance.

Had the Rev. Thomas Boston, senior, lived a few years longer, he would in all probability, from the opinions he had adopted in his old age, have made his way as a Dissenter out of the Church of Scotland; as did his friends Davidson of Galashiels, Wilson of Maxton, and the Erskines of Stirling and Dunfermline. His son Thomas imbibed his sentiments, and even when he was in the height of his popularity, had low opinions of the worth of a Civil establishment of religion, and was planning a secession from the Church of Scotland different from what had yet taken place.

In a volume of Essays written after he was a considerable time a minister, and two of which were published by his son Michael after his death, he speaks very disparagingly, indeed, of the first establishment of Christianity by Constantine: 'We find the emperor Constantine was so very sensible how much the simplicity of the Christian institution prejudiced the Gentiles against it, that when he made it the national religion, he did, at the same time, deck and adorn it with the spoils of the heathen temples: and thus, instead of conforming the world to Christianity, he made Christianity conformed to the mode and fashion of the world. Hence Christianity, under him, did not prevail over the empire by its own power and energy, but by his power and policy; for, when he built magnificent temples for the Christian worship, and enriched and exalted the clergy, and when the profession of that religion was the way to worldly honour and preferment, there was nothing wonderful in its spreading both speedily and universally. Hereby, indeed, the reproach of the Christians among the heathen was taken away; but something infinitely worse succeeded to it: for they became a reproach to their own religion, and as its outward splendour and gaiety increased, its inward power and influence proportionably decreased.'\*

Shortly after his induction into the pastorate of the pa-

\* Essay I., p. 21.

rish of Oxnam, 1753, he published a sermon of his father's 'on Schism,' which he had preached against the close communion principles of the MacMillanites, and in which he had pled at great length for the principles of free communion, both 'laik' and ministerial, as taught in the Confession of Faith. Boston, junior, evidently published it as bearing against the practice of the Seceders in the lamentable breach which had taken place among them. He prefixed to it a long and pungent preface, which left no reader at any loss to discover that though he was using his father's arrows, he was shooting them against a different foe. Making all due allowance for party feeling, which to a certain extent will always exist, it lets out the fact that Boston himself had even then been thinking of the happy effects of a secession from the church on liberal principles. 'I have sometimes thought,' says he, 'that were a secession from the Established Church managed with prudence and temper, and with the sole view of promoting Christianity, it might be of considerable use.' 'My father was very tenacious of what he judged truth, while at the same time he could love, esteem, and honour his brethren that differed from him, and *very freely hold communion with them.*' To enforce this freedom of communion against those close and exclusive principles which were then for a time gaining ground in the Secession, in virtue of their lamentable disagreement about the swearing of the burgess oath, was the main drift of the preface. He lifts up his testimony in no measured terms against 'their delivering so many of their brethren into the hands of the devil,' and then lays down his own principles of catholic communion. 'As serious Christians are agreed in the essentials of our holy religion, even though they should differ in opinion about lesser matters, this ought not to divide them in affection, nor can such differences be justly pled as a sufficient cause for that monstrous thing—schism in the church of Christ. Indeed, should any man deny the doctrine of original sin, the decrees of God, and, in the business of salvation, ascribe more to man's free-will than to God's free grace; should he laugh at justification

through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and sneer at the doctrine of the saints' perseverance; especially, should he deny a trinity of persons in the Godhead;—with all such as denied these, the distinguishing doctrines of revealed religion, he considered it no bigotry not to hold communion; but 'he desired to love all those, of whatsoever denomination they be, that love our Lord Jesus Christ.'\* Now, as these were the principles of Boston when he was minister of the parish of Oxnam, it need not be matter of surprise that they were brought out more decidedly when circumstances conspired to do it, and that they became the leading features of the denomination of which he was afterwards one of the principal founders.

In the year 1755, Jedburgh, which is near to Oxnam, became vacant. The town and country had their eye and heart set upon Boston to be their future pastor. The Crown was the patron; but the Marquis of Lothian, who was not on good terms with Boston, was the nobleman who would likely have the disposal of the charge. The sky not appearing very clear, the elders took the strong step of entering into a written compact a few weeks after the vacancy occurred, in which they 'unanimously agree and resolve, (through the strength of divine grace,) to stand and fall together in the election or voice of a minister for this parish, against all solicitations, threats, or bribes whatsoever, or from whomsoever, and against all intrusion that may be attempted on said parish by any minister whatsoever; and that we shall cleave and adhere firmly to the majority of this parish in the choice as aforesaid.'† This was a powerful confederation, and, having entered into it, they instantly proceeded to procure votes for Mr. Boston.

These preconcerted measures were trodden in the dust. A presentation to the benefice was granted by the king in favour of Mr. John Bonar, minister at Cockpen, a grandson of Bonar of Torphichen,—and who was, in every respect, worthy of a family which, for generations, has been an

\* Preface to Schism.

† Scots Mag., 1756, p. 247. Annals.

honour to the Church of Scotland. The league, however, was not to be broken in this way. Mr. Boston was the man of their choice; whereas Mr. Bonar came by a presentation, with the elders and the great majority of the parish opposing him, aggravated by the fact that he had always hitherto opposed violent settlements.

Not contented with showing at the bar of the Assembly that such violent settlements were contrary to Scripture, apostolic practice, and the principles of the Church of Scotland, they thus concluded their appeal: 'It is a sorry scene to see the pillars of God's church supporting and pleading so avowedly for the disturbers of Zion's peace; and as Joab said to David, "I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth there will not tarry one with thee this night, and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now." Thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither the welfare of the Church nor the edification of souls, the voice of the people nor the entreaties of elders, for this day we perceive that if Mr. John Bonar can but obtain the stipend of Jedburgh, it is no matter though we die in ignorance. Now therefore come forth, arise, and speak comfortably unto this poor afflicted congregation, now lying groaning under the heavy yoke of patronage: and if we can procure no comfort at the hands of God's ministers, we declare roundly, soundly, faithfully and honestly, that we will complain to God himself for a redress of our grievances.'

In the Assembly, to which the cause was carried, several members expressed their apprehensions of serious consequences were the settlement, amid an exasperated people, to be carried forward. The Lord Advocate found it wise to fall from the presentation, that peace might be restored to the place. Even the General Assembly, with all its reverence for church authority, did not venture to enjoin the translation; and Mr. Bonar having got a presentation and call to Perth, was removed out of the way, and the ground was left clear for the Crown again to issue another presentation. This was teaching the people to feel their own



strength, and, if they were not to be gratified with the man for whom they had already given their voices, it was wretched policy. It was making a breach to allow the sea to roll in its waves.

Though the Assembly in their sentence on the case had declared 'it competent to his Majesty the patron, to present any qualified person to be minister of Jedburgh within six months, and had appointed the Presbytery to receive him,' yet the impression was very generally entertained that they had gone beyond their province as an ecclesiastical court, and that the right of presentation was now in the hands of the Presbytery by *jure devoluto*. The magistrates and people of Jedburgh urged the Presbytery to try the legal question in the Court of Session, and promised to pay all expenses connected with the process. If worsted they even said they would build a church for Boston and support him. The Presbytery shrunk from legally asserting their questionable right of presentation. If they had presented, however, they would have presented Boston. This both the congregation and Boston knew, and the Presbytery's want of courage in the emergency, gave no small offence to them, and greatly diminished Boston's confidence in his co-presbyters.\*

The people were not allowed to remain long ignorant of the fact, that they were to have no redress of their grievances; and that, if they were formerly chastised with whips, they were now to be chastised with scorpions. Patronage was the little finger in the presentation of Mr. Bonar, but it was thicker than a man's loins in the presentation of Mr. Douglas of Kenmore, which immediately followed. He was the object of their universal contempt and abhorrence. The principal heritors, the provost, and most of the councillors, were adherents to the call of Mr. Bonar; but the

\* The point here referred to was afterwards, in another case in 1759, fully discussed and settled. It was then found that if a qualified person is presented by the patron, and his settlement is set aside, the time lost before the Church courts does not count in the six months allowed for presentation.



Presbytery of Jedburgh, the magistrates of the town, and the whole parish except '*five*,' openly declared against Douglas. The opposition was universal. The Commission and the Assembly had the subject once and again before them. The translation had to be prosecuted in the name of the Assembly's commission. The Presbytery would not act. They would not be accessory to a single step of the procedure. They even protested against the Commission, and complained to the Assembly. Their language is terse, and demands a place, as showing the sacrilegious nature of civil authority exerted within the bosom of the church of Christ. 'The Commission have ordered the Presbytery to proceed in the transportation of Mr. Douglas, according to the rules of the Church; when all the rules of the Church forbid it. They must transmit the presentation, and the few subscriptions for the presentee, under the name of a call from the parish; when the whole parish, except five, are openly declaring against him. They cannot make out a process of transportation, without reasons to support it; when they cannot find one for it, and all the reason in the world against it. When he comes to be admitted, he must make a solemn declaration of his steadfast adherence, not only to the doctrine and worship, but the whole discipline of the Church of Scotland, as founded on and agreeable to the word of God; when it is evident he could never come there but by the breach or neglect of some of the most important articles of it: That zeal for the glory of God, love to Jesus Christ, and a desire of saving souls, are his chief motives and inducements, and not worldly designs and interests; when, to say the thing in the softest terms, no body will believe him: And that he has had no undue hand, either by himself or others, in procuring his transportation; when all the world sees the evil is owing allenarly to his absolute acceptance of and resolute adherence to his presentation. He must after all this be gravely asked, Whether he closes with this call, and is willing to take the pastoral charge of that people? and they must be asked, Whether they receive and submit to him as their minister?

and if they will permit, it must be taken for granted they do; when all present know they do not. But this is not all: This must all be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; solemn addresses must be made for his blessing on his own ordinance, and his blessing on him whom he has *thus* set over that congregation; and he solemnly admonished to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer. What will profane scoffers say, and what will serious Christians think of such proceedings? '\*

After the Assembly, May 1757, had ordered that the settlement of Mr. Douglas should be proceeded in at all hazards, the people knew that the arm of civil authority would cause him to be inducted. Within the Establishment they were fully aware the power of the State could not be resisted; but they knew also that the constitution of the country provided an asylum for those whose consciences were oppressed; and that they and Mr. Boston required only to come out from under the civil constitution of the Church of Scotland, and no power on earth could keep them separate. When Mr. Boston saw the path of duty, he was not a man to boggle at mere temporalities. He was too popular to be a favourite with the rulers of the Church; and, like his father, as he advanced in life, his partialities had been gradually abating towards the venerable Establishment. The rulers of the Church had resolved, if possible, to keep him from preferment. In the year 1751, the town of Dundee had made an attempt to secure his services; but the Assembly, as we have seen, preferred another to him in a competing call, who was abundantly unpopular. No doubt he had likewise given offence to the moderate party by his conduct in 1756, which was the year his case, conjoined with that of Bonar, was before the Church courts; and the Assembly of which year was also famous for taking up and letting slip through their fingers the infidel writings of Hume and Kaimes. In

\* Scots Mag., 1757, pp. 610, 611.

the summer of that year Boston republished 'Britain's Remembrancer,'\* with a long preface, in which he castigated the infidelity and wickedness of the times in a gentlemanly manner, but with merited severity. There can be little doubt as to his references, though he does not name the authors. 'We have been for some time past,' says he, 'and still continue to be, plagued and pestered with books razing the foundations of natural as well as revealed religion.' His spirited preface could not find favour with those who drank 'Hume's claret,' while yet he was sapping the foundations of that faith they were bound to teach. Boston was disgusted with the condition of the Church, and considered her liberties all but extinct. When a deputation from Jedburgh waited upon him to sound his mind concerning a separation from the Establishment, he was in a great measure prepared for the step, and did not scruple to cast in his lot with the oppressed heritage of God.

His consent having been obtained, the people now saw their way clear to erect a place of worship where they might enjoy the ministrations of him whom they had already called in the sight of God, though thwarted by the power and devices of man. The first meeting was held for this purpose, on the 30th May 1757, and is described as 'a meeting of the magistrates, town-council, several heritors, and inhabitants of the town and parish of Jedburgh, to concert upon proper measures for raising and erecting a *meeting-house* in this town.'† Boston's consent having been secured to become their minister, they drew out a more formal Call for subscription by the people, and appointed committees to go through Jedburgh and the various adjoining parishes, Minto, Hawick, Lilliesleaf, Maxton, Crailing, Morebattle, &c., to collect subscriptions for build-

\* This was a tract which appeared after the year 1745, and which addressed itself smoothly, but powerfully, to the wickedness and practical infidelity of the age. It was originally an English publication.

† Minute Book of Jed. R. C.

ing the house. Ground was purchased. Some gave money. The farmers sent their servants and horses to cart the materials for the building. Wood, iron, and glass for the windows came from various quarters. Those who had no gift to give gave so many days' labour; and, in the incredibly short period of little more than six months from the first meeting, the church was built, seated, and its pulpit filled by Mr. Boston.

As the setting up of the institution was new, and the mode of conducting Dissenting churches was a matter of theory and not of experience, they had to grope their way with caution, and enter into arrangements of a delicate and difficult nature. Two things required to be arranged,—the relation between Mr. Boston and his new flock, and the dissolution of his connection with the Church of Scotland. The latter was simple; the former was more complex, and required immediate attention. During the summer, terms of agreement passed and repassed for amendment and approval between Oxnam and Jedburgh. The business was principally managed by John Ainslie, town-clerk, who was a warm friend of Boston and of religious liberty. Mr. Boston proposed, and it was accepted of, 'that he should meet the congregation of Jedburgh precisely on the principles of the Presbyterian Dissenters in England. He dissents from the Church of Scotland upon the footing of their departure from the ancient policy and discipline with respect to planting vacant parishes with gospel ministers; and he is willing still to hold communion in every thing excepting church judicatures with such ministers in the Church as are sound in the faith, faithful in the discharge of their duty, and opposers of violent settlements.\* These were the terms on which he organized his church. He planted his standard as an English Presbyterian Dissenter, out of all ecclesiastical connexion with the Church of Scotland, and yet willing to hold Christian communion with those of her ministers, or members, who were sound in the

\* Manuscript Copy.

faith, holy in their life, and opposers of those state and church measures which were robbing the people of their right to choose their own pastors.

As to Boston's own pecuniary arrangements with them for the support of himself and family, it was stipulated that he should receive a bond for £120 per annum. He had been instructed, that 'the onerous clause of the bond must not be his preaching the gospel, but the love and favour which the granters bear to him and his family, otherwise it is not valid in law.'\* A number of the most respectable people therefore in Jedburgh at once came forward and signed the bond. For this part of the transaction Mr. Boston suffered much abuse at the time. The magazines of the day opened upon him. Pamphleteers fixed upon this as a peg on which to hang their abuse. Till this day he is held up by some as a mere popular demagogue, seeking worldly pelf; and, under the mask of religion, leaving Oxnam with a stipend of £90, for the new church at Jedburgh with a stipend, secured on bond during his natural life, for £120 yearly. Candour might have asked if Boston, with his learning, character, and first-rate talents as a preacher, would not have made his way to one of the best livings of the Church of Scotland. He required only to exercise a little patience, and use the requisite means of doing homage to patrons and people, and his elevation was morally certain. He had in his power the means of turning the abuse then heaped upon him to his honour; and yet he never employed it. At the time he got the bond he also granted a back-bond to the same parties in the following terms:—'Whereas, by the conception of the said bond, the sum therein contained is made payable during all the days of my life; yet I hereby declare, that, notwithstanding thereof, they shall be no farther bound in payment thereof to me than during my residence and usefulness to them.' So that the cry which was incessantly kept up against him for driving a hard monied bargain with the

\* Manuscript.



people of Jedburgh, was a base and unworthy slander. The cumbrous nature of the arrangement about his stipend sprang from the novelty of the circumstances in which he was placed, and the erroneous information which he had received about the legality of a Dissenting minister's stipend.

The demission of his charge was a much easier matter, as here he was walking on old ecclesiastical ground, and had regular forms to guide his procedure. On the 7th of December 1757, the Established Presbytery met at Jedburgh. The attendance of people in the old church was immense. From the pressure of the crowd most of its pews were broken down. On that day Boston, to the grief of the Presbytery, but to the joy of the people, gave in his demission. It was couched in the following terms:—‘The demission of me, Mr. Thomas Boston, minister at Oxnam, humbly sheweth, Albeit there are several things in the national church, which have been all along disagreeable to me; yet the present method of settling vacant churches by the mere force of presentations, which has been so long persisted in, and is almost every year prosecuted more vigorously, is so diametrically opposite to all the laws of Jesus Christ about that matter, has such a manifest tendency to fill the church with naughty members, to mar the edification of the body of Christ, and, in fine, utterly to destroy the dying remains of religion in the nation, that I can no longer sit a member of the present judicatures of this Church, but must leave my place there, that I may take part with the oppressed heritage of God. When I entered on my ministry in the National Church, more than twenty years ago, even then with concern I beheld violent settlements authorized by the General Assemblies thereof. But in those days there was a very considerable number of members who opposed such violences, and they were by their number and influence a pretty good balance against those who favoured them. Hence, when the General Assembly, or their Commission, had authorized a violent settlement, the next Assembly was readily composed of such



members as were inclined to check and control these tyrannical measures. But, alas! the times are visibly altered to the worse! The bulk of those worthy men who opposed the encroachments complained of, are, it is likely, removed to their rest and reward. The evidence hereof is, that, for a course of years past, we find one Assembly after another changing their members, but never changing their tyrannical measures in settling vacant churches. Those who adhere to the ancient principles and practice of the Church of Scotland in this matter, are now reduced to such a small and inconsiderable handful, that they are quite run down by the numerous opponents, and have it not in their power to reform those crying abuses, nor to do justice to the oppressed, while they continue in the communion of the Church. Upon these, and other considerations, which afterwards may be made manifest, I judge it my duty to give up the place which I hold as a minister of the National Church, and at the same time to continue in the full exercise of that ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, as God in his providence shall give me opportunity. Therefore wit ye me, the said Mr. Thomas Boston, to have demitted and laid down, likeas I hereby *simpliciter* demit and lay down my pastoral charge of the parish of Oxnam, and deliver over the said parish into the hands of the Reverend Presbytery of Jedburgh, within whose bounds it lies; craving that the said Reverend Presbytery may, upon this my demission being lodged in their clerk's hands, and read in their presence, find the said parish vacant, and cause the same be declared in due form, and proceed to the settlement of a gospel minister therein, with all convenient speed. Upon all which I take instruments, and crave extracts. T. BOSTON.\*

Every member of Presbytery objected to receiving his demission save the elder of Jedburgh, who was anxious, of course, that he should be set free, and become their pastor. Boston was inflexible. His mind was made up to the step. He was

\* Scots Mag., 1758, p. 266.

not doing it abruptly, but after mature deliberation ; and on what appeared to him solid grounds. He read a long paper which he had carefully prepared in defence of his conduct. It was, in a great measure, an echo of his 'demission,' only more argumentative and particular, and touching upon points which were rather of a personal than public nature. He declared his dissent from all the judicatures of the Church ; and that he would, henceforward, be a member of none of her courts ; but, as he believed there were good Christians within her pale, he would be willing to hold communion, both lay and ministerial, with all such as were sound in the faith and holy in their practice. While he would not divide the congregations of faithful ministers, yet he could not co-operate ecclesiastically with those who were intruding ministers upon reclaiming congregations contrary to the Scriptures ; and that was the almost universal character of the present pastors of the church. To perpetuate a faithful gospel-ministry, and relieve the oppressed heritage of God, he considered it as indispensable that some ministers should throw in their lot with them. He might stand till the day of his death, in the Presbytery, testifying against oppression ; but would that bring any relief to the oppressed congregation of Jedburgh ? When souls were perishing, ministers must not live at their ease, but leave their warm house in the midst of the storm, throw the rope, and put forth all their activity to save others in the moment of peril. To relieve the oppressed, he voluntarily gave up a certain living in the Establishment for what was deemed a precarious subsistence out of it. He left the loaves and the fishes, and followed the dictates of conscience for the purpose of doing good.

The Presbytery still refused to accept of his demission, dissuaded him from his purpose, and required him to attend to the duties of his office as formerly at Oxnam. He had not, however, so learned Christ. He might have said with Paul, ' What mean ye to weep and to break my heart ? for I am ready not only to be bound but to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.' His demission was laid

upon the table, couched in these expressive terms: 'Albeit there were several things in the national church which have all along been disagreeable to me.' And having wrenched the yoke from off his neck, he was not to be coaxed to have it again slipped over his ears. The people could scarcely brook the importunities of the Presbytery, and afterwards gave them perhaps less credit for their sympathy, and more credit for a covert design to mar their plans, than what in a spirit of charity they were in all probability fairly entitled to.

It is impossible to read this recital of facts connected with the demission of Boston, and not to approve of the charity, magnanimity, and zeal for religion which it displays. The thing was done calmly, deliberately, nobly. He saw the Fathers of the Church of Scotland, who had been the friends of truth and liberty, becoming a small and inconsiderable handful. Tyrannical measures and presentations by force were filling the Church with naughty members. The remains of religion were expiring among the people. They had few or none to plead for their cause, and maintain their rights and privileges. It was in vain now to remain within its pale, and seek to reform its abuses. There had always been things about the National Church which he disliked, but during the last twenty years, or in other words, from the time of the Secession of the Erskines, it had become so corrupt and tyrannical that he could no longer remain within it, and therefore he felt it his duty to give up his connexion with it. 'Willing still, however, to hold communion, both lay and ministerial, with such of her ministers and members as were sound in the faith and holy in their practice, but if even these were oppressors of God's heritage, he could not co-operate ecclesiastically with them. He renounced fellowship of every kind with those who were intruding ministers upon reclaiming congregations, 'and this was all but the universal character of the present pastors of the Church of Scotland.' In all this there was a beautiful mixture of fidelity and kindness. He strove without a bitter word, and only when truth

and duty demanded it, to separate the precious from the vile.

On Friday, 9th Dec., 1757, Mr. Boston was inducted into the new church, built for him at Jedburgh. The bells were rung. The magistrates and council, in the insignia of their office, walked in procession to the meeting-house. They were all members of the congregation, and had been mainly instrumental in carrying forward the undertaking. At least two thousand people were present. 'His admission,' says an eye-witness, 'was performed with as much order as the circumstances of the case would permit, by Mr. Roderick Mackenzie, a dissenting minister lately from England, but who was shortly to accept a charge in the same way at Nigg in Ross-shire: a Presbytery was constituted *ad hunc effectum*; and the questions usually put to ministers at their admission were put to Mr. Boston on this occasion, with a small variation in one or two of them, arising from the peculiarity of his case, which was so supplied as to bind him to hold communion with, and be subject to his brethren in the Lord, if an opportunity should be afforded him; and he was moreover taken bound against Episcopacy and the supremacy on the one hand, and sectarianism on the other; and to maintain the succession to the crown of these realms in the illustrious House of Hanover. Mr. Boston having answered all these questions agreeable to the *ecclesiastic* constitutions of the Church of Scotland; the town-council, the session, and whole body of the people, were desired to declare their adherence to the same principles, and to Mr. Boston as their minister; which all of them did, by the stretching out of their right hands; and then they joined in humble and fervent prayer for God's blessing on him who was thus set over them as their minister. In fine, the day was religiously observed, in fasting, prayer, and sermons adapted to the occasion, and the whole performed with as much solemnity and decency as hath been known in these parts on like occasions.'\*

\* Scots Mag., 1757, p. 667.

On Sabbath, Mr. Mackenzie again preached, taking as his text, Isa. xxvi. 4, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' Mr. Boston preached in the afternoon, on these words, Eph. vi. 18, 19, 'Praying always—that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, and, in the application, said, among other things, that as he had never entertained his hearers with reflections on any set of men, those who expected such things would be disappointed. The audience was so numerous, that many of them sat without, opposite to the windows, which were opened; and about fifty, who could not hear, went to the old church, where Mr. Rogers, minister of Hunam, was preaching by appointment of the presbytery; whose whole auditory, it is said, did not exceed eighty.'\*

Every thing connected with the settlement was according to the ordering of Mr. Boston himself; and, at the distance of upwards of eighty years, when dissent has become a thing of experience and of repeated ecclesiastic legislation, the forms observed are in many respects models to be imitated. He did not innovate upon the ecclesiastic forms of the country for the sake of innovation; and yet he was careful to plant himself down as the nucleus of a new denomination, distinct from the Establishment, if ever in providence any brethren should associate themselves with him. 'He answered all the questions agreeable to the ecclesiastic constitutions of the Church of Scotland,' carefully avoiding the civil acts of parliament by which she was established, and her ministers inducted, against which he particularly dissented. Mr. Mackenzie was on his way to erect an Independent church; and yet, even though there might have been a temptation to associate with him, he preferred the Presbyterian order. He made distinct provision for carrying it out with co-presbyters, if an opportunity offered; while yet he took care to have the usual

\* Scots Mag., 1757, pp. 667, 668.

formula altered even in little matters, that it might harmonize with his present profession and circumstances. He particularly stipulated for the principles of free communion, and bound himself equally, in the presence of his people, against 'supremacy' and 'sectarianism.' He thus reared a platform in Scotland which was entirely new, and which has been gradually ever since influencing more or less the public mind. The same opinions were indeed held by others, but it was rather by sufferance than avowedly, in their different religious denominations; whereas he avowed them as the landmarks of his party, should presbyters ever gather around his standard.

After his induction, Boston preached to crowded audiences, and persons from a great distance formed a considerable portion of his congregation. The surrounding parishes poured in their population every Sabbath into Jedburgh, and his church became the focus of light and warmth to the whole of the populous neighbourhood. The Established Presbytery now accepted of his demission, for the rubicon, on his part, was now crossed. Oxnam was declared vacant. The synod of Merse and Teviotdale remitted the whole matter to the supreme court, that the weight of its authority might be interposed in inflicting a severe censure. Boston was summoned to attend, as if he had been under law to the church. He knew better what was due to the deliberate step which he had taken, than to appear as a panel at the bar of a church all whose judicatories he had voluntarily renounced. The Assembly having taken up his case, came unanimously to the following resolution: 'The General Assembly, in respect of the particular circumstances attending this cause, did agree to take Mr. Boston's demission under their consideration, together with the proceedings of the Presbytery of Jedburgh relating to him, whereby they find, that he has declared himself to be no minister of this church, and that he will not hold communion with her judicatures; and did therefore, without a vote, declare, that he is incapable of receiving or accepting a presentation or call to any parish in



this church, without the special allowance of some future General Assembly; and the General Assembly does hereby prohibit all the ministers of this church, from employing him to preach or perform any ministerial offices for them, or from being employed by him, unless some future Assembly shall see cause to take off this prohibition.\* This sentence contrasts very unfavourably with the tone and language of the 'demission' of Mr. Boston. He voluntarily withdrew from the judicatories of the church for reasons assigned, and yet professed affection to those whom he deemed Christians within her pale, and proffered to hold occasional communion with them either as a minister or private Christian; but the Assembly displayed no corresponding temper. They not only excluded him from their courts, which was the corresponding part of his paper, but they set the mark of reprobation upon him as a person whom no one of their number was either to aid or employ. He was in fact dealt with as a factious brother instead of being treated as a conscientious dissenter.

The authority of the Assembly, cutting him off from all communion with the church, could not touch him as a minister of the gospel called of God to minister to his oppressed people. He intermeddled not with the affairs of the Establishment, and did not even print his defence before the Presbytery, though it was prepared for that purpose, and eagerly expected. Boston having removed himself out of the way, Douglas—with his five callers—was *quietly* ordained at Jedburgh on the 28th July: all the ministers of the Presbytery being present. It cannot be said that he sunk into obscurity, for he never rose into notice.

The first time Boston dispensed the sacrament, the course of people was immense. The name of Boston was a household word among all the pious people of Scotland. His eloquence was of the very highest order. Besides, he now wore the laurels of being a voluntary victim for the

\* Scots Mag., 1758, p. 267.

rights and liberties of the people. The town on Saturday was crowded with strangers from Edinburgh, from beyond the Forth, from the fertile vale of the Merse, and from the upland districts to the west, where father and son had so long laboured with so much acceptance. According to the practice of that part of the country at that period, the ordinance was to be dispensed in the open air. The spot fixed on was a little holm, called the ANA, on the banks of the Jed, and close by the town. It was as if art and nature had made it for the purpose to which it was that day to be devoted. It is shaped like a parallelogram. At the one end is the access to it from the public road. Along the one side flows the rippling Jed; along the other a long line of orchards and trees shutting out the view of the town; at the other end or bottom, though it is nearly level, there rises a high precipitous *brae* with red scaurs from the shooting down of the earth, and here and there a few trees struggling to hold their position in its almost perpendicular face. The Jed strikes the face of the *brae*, and is turned away nearly at a right angle, and escapes by a concealed outlet covered by trees with their leafy shade. At the base of this natural wall or *brae* a temporary pulpit was erected. The communion-tables stretched out from it in two long rows covered with linen white as snow. The day was all that man could wish. The sun shed down his sweet lustre from a forenoon sky without a cloud. The little vale was filled like the area of an immense cathedral. The face of the almost perpendicular rising ground behind the pulpit was studded over with parties who could find the root of a tree or a projection on which to fix themselves. There was no bustle, but a calm solemnity becoming the sacred day, and the simple solemn service in which they were to be employed. Every head was uncovered when Mr. Boston, attended by his elders and the magistrates of the place, walked on to his allotted station, from whence he, unaided, was to dispense among all these thousands the bread of life. The wide dome of heaven spread over his head, made him feel that he was worshipping in a nobler temple than

was ever constructed by the hands of man. The smile of a gracious Master sustained him. The sacrament on the Ana is a day which children, then unborn, have learned to talk of with rapture, and the stranger is still taken to the spot where Boston and his people first pledged their love to each other over the memorials of a bleeding Saviour. The impressions carried away from thence by the immense multitude, on behalf of the claims of piety and the rights of conscience, were invaluable in an age when the mind was fettered by state-enactments in behalf of religion. What Boston could do so nobly, others might at least attempt with some prospect of success.

When the dispensation of the Lord's Supper came round again, Mr. Boston invited Mr. Gillespie to assist him. It seems a little strange that Gillespie's aid was not procured sooner, as their circumstances were so much akin to each other; and Gillespie owed his first religious impressions to Boston's father. It is idle to speculate on a point where there is no light. Gillespie acceded to his request. It was not so easy travelling then as now between Dunfermline and Jedburgh. On Saturday he did not arrive; on Sabbath morning he was not come. Boston went to the church, where the sacrament was to be dispensed by him, alone. A whole day's services were before him; and taking strangers along with his own congregation, (aged persons report that) 1,800 would at times communicate with him. During the morning-prayer, Mr. Boston heard the pulpit door open, and a foot come gently in behind him. It was then the custom for the assistant minister to go to the pulpit during the action sermon. He could scarcely be deceived as to his visitant. His prayer was speedily drawn to a close. Turning round—*it was Mr. Gillespie*. In the face of the whole congregation, whose feelings were wound up to the highest pitch of excitement, he gave him a most cordial welcome. A rush of tender feelings came over the heart of Gillespie as he received the hand of his friend. To his father, under God, he owed his spiritual birth. For six years he had stood alone without one he could call his

brother. The same rigorous authority which had cast him out had given him a Boston as his first clerical friend in his anomalous condition. He was completely overcome. The droppings of inward sorrows, which had been gathering for years in the recesses of his heart, now burst forth in tears of joy. All the time Mr. Boston preached the opening sermon, he sat behind him weeping like a child. A friendship begun and nursed in these circumstances must have had a strength and warmth to which common friendships are entire strangers. From this time forward they followed joint measures for promoting the liberty of the Christian people, and affording relief to oppressed parishes, though they did not constitute themselves into a regular presbytery till three years afterwards.

Colingsburgh was the third congregation which joined the standard of religious liberty, and had the honour of being a component part of the Presbytery of Relief at its formation. It originated from an obnoxious settlement in Kilconquhar, Fife, in which parish Colingsburgh is a populous village. The Earl of Balcarras, as patron, presented to the pastorate, Dr. John Chalmers, minister of Elie, who was very much disliked by the elders, and the great majority of the parishioners. The people, with great spirit, opposed his translation; and in this they were supported both by the presbytery of St. Andrews and synod of Fife. These courts refused to carry into effect the translation in the face of a reclaiming congregation. An appeal was taken from their judgment to the commission of the Assembly in November 1759, and ultimately to the Assembly itself in 1760, which sustained the call, and enjoined the Presbytery forthwith to carry the translation into effect. The remonstrance of the people were entirely disregarded. On this occasion Dr. Wotherspoon delivered one of his cutting speeches; but with all its teeth, he was merely biting a file: 'For a probationer,' said he, 'to adhere to a presentation, notwithstanding the opposition of the people, there may be some excuse; but for a settled minister not only to act this part, but to excel all that ever were before him, in

a bold and insolent contempt of the people, as plainly appears to be Dr. Chalmers's case, is such conduct, that I shall have a worse opinion of this Assembly than I have at present, if they do not openly express their indignation at such indecency of behaviour. In the history of the church we find no character more odious, or more unclerical, if I may speak so, than ambition and open solicitation of ecclesiastical preferment. Moderator, it is not only the people of the parish, or those of lower rank, but many of all stations whom we shall offend, in the proper sense of the word, if we order this settlement. They are led by such things to treat, and they often do treat with derision, a minister's concern for his usefulness, and affirm that it is no more than a desire of a comfortable benefice and salary for life. I shall be sorry to see the day when, by resembling them in their practice, we shall learn from England to leave the people and the work altogether out of the act, and so call our charges no more *parishes* but *livings*.\*

The settlement was ordered to take place before the first of August. Such were the determination and vigorous efforts of the people that, by the fifteenth of the same month, they had purchased ground, collected some subscriptions, and taken measures to build for themselves a large meeting-house in the village of Colingsburgh, which was the most central situation for the accommodation of the parish, and other surrounding districts who, like themselves, had ministers inflicted upon them contrary to their wishes. It does not appear that they had at first any fixed purpose concerning the nature of the church they were about to erect, save that they were to have a meeting-house, and to elect their own pastor. In this they were united; and also in their opposition to Dr. Chalmers. They expected countenance from some of the neighbouring parish ministers who had been their friends in the church-courts; and were also encouraged to proceed in their un-

\* Wotherspoon's Works, vol. viii., pp. 290, 291.

undertaking by the example and advice of Messrs. Gillespie and Boston.

This step being taken, they instantly felt themselves in an entirely new position. All the neighbouring ministers in the Establishment refused to baptize their children unless they produced a recommendatory letter from Dr. Chalmers, their parish minister. Even Mr. Smith, of Newburn, who had been their warmest friend, refused. They had neither freedom of conscience to ask letters of recommendation from a person who was intruded among them, nor would they likely have obtained them. In these circumstances they applied repeatedly to Mr. Gillespie to come and preach, and baptize their children. He was not very prompt, however, in acceding to their request. He 'would not be prevailed upon till every minister in the presbytery did refuse, although we wrote and sent some of our number to him several times; and when we were altogether destitute, then he thought he had the Lord's call to come and preach, and baptize our children.'\* Circumstances thus necessitated them to seek a connection with Mr. Gillespie; while he, on the other hand, would not dispense religious ordinances to them till the ministers, whom they still recognised in their neighbourhood, did distinctly 'refuse' them and their children sealing ordinances. By putting the neighbouring ministers to this test he avoided, as he thought, the sin of schism. They thus became Dissenters by compulsion, and Relief Dissenters by choice, for the Secession offered them sermon, which they respectfully declined.

When Mr. Gillespie first came and preached among them, a circumstance occurred which not unfrequently occurred afterwards in Relief congregations, and which shows how little religious liberty was at that time understood. Mr. Gillespie preached in a tent; and a great number of people having flocked to hear him, the elders, at the solicitation of the congregation, collected on the occasion upwards of

\* Col. Minute Book, p. 8.



£6 for building their church. Such, however, was the dread of the parish session filching it from them by law, and such the rumour of a threatened process, that they were constrained to take legal advice on the point. It was found in their case, as in all others afterwards, that the parish session could not touch a farthing of a collection made for the support of a dissenting church. To take away even the colour of its being made by elders in the parish, the managers were henceforth appointed to stand and receive the collection from the people. In this manner the practice of managers rather than elders standing at the *plate* on Sabbath, was early introduced, and sprang, as might have been conjectured, from no disrespect to the elders, but from prudential considerations.

The church was speedily reared. Several neighbouring parishes, such as Largo, Newburn, and St. Andrews, sent in their contributions. In the spring of 1761, they framed for themselves a constitution, by entering into what they called 'a joint copartnery and society for religious purposes,' among the subscribers and contributors. The very first article of their copartnery was, 'That the said society and copartnery shall continue from hence until the same shall be dissolved by the joint concurrence of at least two-third parts of the partners; and it is hereby declared that the society shall not be dissolved in any other way.' They connected themselves with no religious body whatever, but set up a solitary church, resolved in some way or other to maintain their religious independence and privileges.

As Gillespie was in their neighbourhood, and had set them an example of supporting religious ordinances, remaining as he did nine years alone, in the face and against the authority of the whole Church of Scotland. They were therefore emboldened by his pattern, and looked to him for direction and aid. By his advice, they first called 'the Rev. Thomas Scott, a dissenting minister at Hexham, England.' After mature deliberation, he declined their invitation, as the congregation was numerous, and his constitution was not very robust. This damped them consi-

derably. But they were not to be dispirited by a single unsuccessful overture. Fresh commissioners were despatched to Dunfermline and Jedburgh to consult with their tried friends in affliction—Gillespie and Boston. In a short time they were instructed by them to open up a communication with ‘the Rev. Thomas Colier, minister of the gospel at Ravenstondale, Westmoreland, England, as a person of good report who would likely accept of a harmonious call from their congregation.’ Mr. Colier was a native of Fife, and had gone to England, where he had received a call from a nonconformist congregation, and was labouring amongst them.

The congregation were very desirous of hearing and judging personally of Mr. Colier’s attainments and gifts. They had only heard Mr. Scott by commissioners. At their earnest solicitation, Mr. Colier was prevailed upon first to preach in Mr. Gillespie’s church, and afterwards to supply the pulpit of Colingsburgh for two successive Sabbaths. The people were fully satisfied. With great cordiality they invited him to become their pastor. Though the call was not given according to Presbyterian order, it was conducted with great solemnity; and what it lacked in point of usual form, it possessed in affectionate and touching simplicity. ‘At the people’s desire a call was drawn up to the said Mr. Thomas Colier, and harmoniously subscribed by the elders, and many hundreds of people in a public manner before witnesses. The people put the same into the hands of the elders and principal managers to give unto Mr. Colier, who inquired of us the motives whereby we were excited, and also the principles we acted from. He did accept of our call, and declared to us, in the Lord’s strength, to essay by his grace to the utmost of his ability to fulfil the work of that ministry he had received from the Lord, for the edification of this great and numerous congregation.’\* His stipend was fixed at £60, with a manse. Neither Mr. Gillespie nor Boston were present at the forma-

\* Col. M. B., p. 28.

tion of this ministerial compact. It was transacted by the congregation in the presence of the great Head of the church; and when they put their call into Mr. Colier's hands, and he accepted of it, their eyes literally 'beheld their teacher.' As Mr. Colier was from among the dissenters in England, this mode of forming a ministerial engagement with a Christian society would be perfectly familiar to him, and was in all probability suggested by himself. It was akin to that of an English Presbyterian or Congregational church agreement between pastor and people, prior to ordination.

Mr. Colier having come from England, and taken up his abode at Colingsburgh among his people, preparations were made in a few weeks for his formal induction. In this service both Gillespie and Boston agreed to take a part, and after the service to form themselves into a Presbytery. These were very important proceedings, and a record of them, in the Minute Book of the Colingsburgh congregation, has been happily preserved. On the day preceding the induction, Mr. Colier and his people observed a solemn fast; accommodating themselves also, in this matter, rather to the English Congregational than to the Scotch Presbyterian model. A session was constituted on the morning of the day of induction, and an elder was chosen to be a member of the intended Presbytery. Elders from each of the other two congregations were also to be present. The three churches, by their office-bearers, thus met upon an equality, and took an equal share in the business of the day. As the minute of the proceedings of that day is an important document, it is necessary to give it entire, that the three Fathers may be heard to speak for themselves. They are the best expounders of their own meaning :—

'COLINGSBURGH, 1761. October, 22d day, being formerly fixed for Mr. Colier's admission to be minister of this congregation—a day immediately after a solemn fast. The elders met in the morning; found it necessary that one of their number should be chosen by them to be a member of

the intended Presbytery; so for that purpose they called Mr. Colier, and, after constituting a session, made choice of Alexander Scott to be a member of this intended Presbytery. The members present, besides the ministers, are as follows: viz. William Ramsay, Thomas Russel, Andrew Wilson, George Taylor, and Alexander Scott, elders.

‘This 22d October, 1761, the Rev. Mr. Thomas Boston, minister of the gospel at Jedburgh, preached the admission sermon from 1 Cor. ii. 2. ‘For I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified:’ and afterwards proceeded to all the other parts of the solemnity according to Scripture; and then the elders, principal managers, and whole body of the people, received Mr. Colier as their minister.

‘In the evening of this day the persecuted ministers met with Mr. Colier, and an elder from each of their congregations in the session-house here, and formed themselves into a Presbytery, called the Presbytery of Relief, for the reasons following:—

‘Whereas Thomas Gillespie, minister of the gospel at Carnock, was deposed by the General Assembly, 1752, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by him to them, from the office of the holy ministry, and prohibited and discharged to exercise the same or any part thereof within this Church—the Established Church of Scotland—in all time coming. And they thereby did and do declare the church and parish of Carnock vacant from and after the date of that sentence,”—merely because he would not settle Mr. Andrew Richardson, then minister at Broughton, as minister of the gospel at Inverkeithing, contrary to the will of the congregation. This, in contradiction to Scripture, in opposition to the standing laws of the Church of Scotland, and what had therefore been a manifest violation of the solemn oath and engagements he came under when admitted minister of Carnock—therefore a presumptuous sin. Thus (a) highly ag-

gravated transgression of the law of the great God and our Saviour.

‘Mr. Thomas Boston, when minister of the gospel at Oxnam, received a scriptural call from the parish and congregation of Jedburgh, to minister among them in holy things, the which call he regularly accepted according to Christ’s appointment: And as the Presbytery of Jedburgh refused to loose his relation ’twixt him and the parish and congregation of Oxnam, and establish a relation ’twixt him and the parish and congregation of Jedburgh, though required. He thought they refused to do their duty. He was bound to do his by the Divine authority. Therefore peaceably and orderly gave in to that Presbytery a demission of his charge of Oxnam, and took charge of the congregation of Jedburgh.

‘Mr. Thomas Colier, late minister of the gospel at Ravenstondale, in England, has accepted a call from the oppressed congregation of Kilconquhar, and others joined with them, to fulfil among them that ministry he has received of the Lord.

‘These three ministers think themselves indispensably bound by the authority of the Lord Redeemer, King and Head of his church, to fulfil every part of the ministry they have received from him, and for that end, in concurrence with ruling elders, to constitute a presbytery as Scripture directs; for committing that ministry Christ has intrusted them with to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others; and to act for the relief of oppressed Christian congregations—when called in Providence. And therein they act precisely the same part they did when ministers,—members of the Established Church of Scotland.

‘In consequence whereof, Mr. Thomas Colier, late minister in Ravenstondale, having got a unanimous call from the congregation at Colingsburgh to be their minister, was this day admitted to the office, after sermon preached from 1 Cor. ii. 2. by Mr. Thomas Boston, minister at Jedburgh. And the same day, at four of the clock in the afternoon,

Messrs. Boston, Gillespie, and Colier, with an elder from their respective congregations, viz. from the congregation of Jedburgh, George Rutherford; from the congregation of Dunfermline, Provost David Turnbull; from the congregation of Colingsburgh, Alexander Scott; convened in the meeting-house of Colingsburgh, and by solemn prayer by Mr. Thomas Gillespie, formed themselves into a presbytery for the relief of Christians oppressed in their Christian privileges.

‘The Presbytery, thus constituted, chose Mr. Thomas Boston for their moderator, and the above Alexander Scott for their clerk *pro tempore*. The Presbytery adjourned to the house of Alexander Scott.

‘The Presbytery appoints the seventeenth day of December next to be observed in the congregations under their inspection as a day of solemn thanksgiving unto God for his goodness in the late harvest, and agreed their next meeting should be when Providence calls.

‘The sederunt closed with prayer.’

This minute is a very important document in the History of the Relief Body, and is the only authentic record of its constitution as a Presbytery. The portion of it which is properly the minute of Presbytery, and which begins with giving the reasons of their forming themselves into an ecclesiastical court, is evidently given at the dictation of Mr. Gillespie. It is cast in his strong, rugged, and somewhat involved style. The point studiously brought out in the narration is the fact, that they were all suffering persecution and oppression in their religious rights and privileges, and therefore necessitated, from a respect to the authority of Christ, the King and Head of his church, to take the step of forming themselves into a separate Presbytery. Very particular prominence is given to the sentence of deposition passed upon Mr. Gillespie. It is placed in two lights. First, it is represented as a gross outrage, performed in the name of Christ as the Head of his church; and, secondly, it is pointed out as being a sentence of deposition,



limited merely to the Church of Scotland; so that Gillespie was still warranted to exercise, *out of* the Church of Scotland, the office of the ministry. It is very remarkable, that both in the ordination of Mr. Colier, and in constituting themselves as a Presbytery, the minute bears, 'that the solemnity was performed according to Scripture;' and farther, they 'constitute a Presbytery as Scripture directs.' There is not a single phrase recognising the laws and canons of the Church of Scotland. The Confession of Faith is not even mentioned. The following are the principles embodied evidently in the minute, as characterizing this new denomination:—1. It was to be called the Presbytery of Relief. 2. It was to be a Presbyterian denomination, composed of ministers and ruling elders, with churches under their inspection. 3. It recognised the 'Lord Redeemer King and Head of his church.' 4. Its rule was the Scriptures. 5. It claimed the power, as a scripturally constituted Presbytery, to license and ordain others for the work of the ministry. 6. It particularly proffered assistance and relief to all oppressed Christian congregations. 7. Under Christ, as the Head of his church, it appointed its own seasons and forms of worship, and therefore, at its very first meeting, appointed a day of thanksgiving 'in all the congregations under their inspection.'

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE EXTENSION OF THE RELIEF PRESBYTERY—ITS PRINCIPLES.

THE fact that a Presbytery for the relief of oppressed Christians had been constituted, diffused great joy over many a district in Scotland. So long as Gillespie and Boston continued separate, they were regarded as persons bearing a noble testimony to the truth, and also as the genuine friends of religious liberty. Still they were not a centre around which others could congregate, and from whence oppressed parishes might expect a regular dispensation of religious ordinances. But henceforth as a regularly constituted body, they were to license preachers, ordain ministers, set up churches, and carry on the cause of Christ in destitute and oppressed localities. In their united capacity they were to perform every thing, which was competent for them to perform, when they were members and ministers of the Church of Scotland, and this was cheering.

Oppressed parishes instantly applied to them for deliverance from the yoke of patronage, legal preaching, and those tyrannical measures which were now in fashion in Church courts. The people were wearied with contending against those who apparently seemed delighted in crushing their spirit, and thwarting their desires and likings. Blair-Logie, Auchtermuchty, Bell's Hill, Edinburgh, Campbelton, Glasgow, Dunse, Anderston, Kilsyth, Irvine, Dalkeith, Kilmaronock, Dysart, St. Ninians, Falkirk, Cupar Fife, and other places during the first ten years of the existence of the Presbytery, applied to them to be taken under their inspection; and from the very first the Christian people

assembled as large forming congregations. In not a few instances, nearly the whole inhabitants of the place deserted the Parish Church, and left its pews gaping in emptiness to 'the moral harangues,' as they were called, of the intruder. In a cold winter day, the kitchen of the parish minister was more than sufficiently spacious to accommodate the patron and a few parish paupers who still clung to the church of the state.

The main evil against which the Relief Presbytery had to struggle at its commencement, was one which nearly all denominations have at their origin more or less felt. They had no preachers to send to those towns and villages which were importunate to receive their countenance and aid. The very number of the applications which were made, perplexed and enfeebled them. The churches of the first three ministers during the summer were all but deserted. Large forming congregations could only have sermon at most twice or thrice during the year. This was very discouraging. Still the three Brethren persevered, and on week-days and Sabbath-days erected their standard in many a quarter.

Their evangelical Presbyterianism and liberal principles becoming gradually known among the different religious denominations of Scotland, and also among the orthodox Presbyterian Churches in England, several ministers and preachers from among them were persuaded that the new denomination was standing upon Scripture ground, and therefore gave in their demission to their Church courts, and joined the Presbytery of Relief. Such accessions were received as—The Rev. Messrs. Bain, Simpson, Cruden, Pinkerton, Bell, &c., from the Establishment. The Rev. Messrs. Scott, Warren, Neil, Monteith, M. Boston, &c., from the Presbyterian Dissenters in England. The Rev. Messrs. Hutchison, Kerr, Laurence, Bonar, James Bonar, &c., from the Secession. The Rev. Messrs. Robertsons and Auld from the Reformed Presbytery. Not a few of these persons were men of very considerable attainments, possessed of attractive gifts as public speakers, and proved themselves labo-

rious and faithful ministers. Being the avowed friends of the pure unadulterated gospel of Christ, and the staunch advocates of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made his people free, they were welcomed throughout the country as general favourites, and wheresoever they preached on Sacramental or other occasions, immense crowds collected from all quarters to hear them.

It can easily be conceived that such a wide-spread movement among the people, and such defections of ministers and preachers from all the religious denominations of the country, could not take place without exciting jealousies among other churches, and fears what this new formed party might attain to. Its peculiarities required to be narrowly examined, and its progress if possible arrested, otherwise it might fill the whole land; and if its principles were unscriptural much evil might be done, which it would be difficult thereafter to undo and remedy. This, whether true or not, was plausible.

The Establishment began the party warfare by inter-communing those ministers and preachers who joined the Relief. Next the Rev. Mr. MacMillan Sandihills, of the Reformed Presbytery, attacked them from the press,—‘for their mixed communion with the Established church,—for their relieving the consciences of men from the yoke of the sacred national moral vows and covenants,—and from the strictness of true Presbyterian discipline and government,—and for their latitudinarian unscriptural terms of communion founded on a blind supposition of men’s goodness.’ The cry being once raised, it was speedily taken up by others. Cowan of Colingsburgh having factiomed with Bennet the Antiburgher minister of Cupar, the war between the Secession and Relief speedily began. The kindling of the first straw was sufficient. Pamphlet followed upon pamphlet ably and acrimoniously written, in which the founders of the Relief were openly accused of schism, for having left the Establishment without protesting against its defections,—still holding communion with it,—issuing no testimony for the truth,—throwing open their commu-

nion to all visible saints,—making a distinction between “essentials” and “non-essentials,”—breaking down the hedge of Presbyterian Church government, by denying the binding obligation of the national covenant and solemn league,—introducing a boundless toleration, and setting up a church on the ruins of the grand distinguishing principles of the Reformation.’ In some quarters they were farther accused of preaching legal doctrine, and with not being sufficiently attentive to the exercise of discipline.

Not a few of these charges are just such as rival denominations have always urged against each other, and which they will continue to urge till parties shall cease to exist, and the church becomes one in Christ Jesus. It is because each denomination thinks itself sounder in the faith than all others, and purer than all others, that it stands apart from all others; and therefore considers itself entitled to praise itself and administer reproof. The Relief, on its part, naturally set itself up as better than all others, and as being more enlightened and liberal than all the prior denominations in the country. It looked askance upon them all as narrow and bigotted, and as entirely behind the age. It was proud of its attainments. Unless its ministers indeed had had their distinguishing peculiarities on which they took their stand, and in which they gloried, they could not have set up a distinct Presbyterian platform. And yet after the fire and smoke of controversy have been blown away, it must be confessed, that on all sides there was a lamentable magnifying of lesser discrepancies into important differences; and farther, that many essential points of agreement were at the same time sadly overlooked. It was a warfare rather about the tything of mint, anise, and cumin, than about the weightier matters of the law.

Unquestionably it served at least one important end. The Relief Presbytery had been at fault in not letting the public know in some authentic way, what were the great principles which they held and which they were prepared to maintain. They had come off from the Establishment and the other denominations, not as a body, but one by

one. They had therefore no opportunity of lifting up a joint testimony; and as they came from different denominations, and were displeased with the narrowness of their terms of communion, it would have been ungracious to have left them under the flag of catholic communion, or in other words, communion among all visible saints, and yet to have inscribed upon that very flag their own party distinctions, as things in which they vaunted, flinging them insultingly in the face of others. These considerations, and perhaps others induced them simply to proclaim their adherence to the Westminster standards, and to leave individual ministers to make known their lesser peculiarities in the way which they considered the most prudent. Now, however, in the midst of a hot pamphlet war, this passive policy would not serve their purpose any longer as a distinct church. They must come forth either as a body and put down clamour by telling what they were, or some one of their number must do it, whom the public would regard as having both the honesty and information which were necessary to tell what the Relief system really was.

The latter alternative was the one resorted to, and the Rev. Patrick Hutchison of St. Ninians, afterwards of Paisley, applied himself to the work, and executed it to the entire satisfaction of his brethren. In as far as sharp controversial language was employed against his adversaries, this is not now to be taken into account, for when Gael meets Gael sword in hand, many an unlooked for flash of fire gleams from their blades. It has ever been allowed on all hands that he has fairly and clearly stated the outlines of the doctrine taught in Relief pulpits, and also stated at full length that ecclesiastical polity which they set up, and which during their separate existence they endeavoured to maintain. It is essential that the sum of these matters as they came from his pen should be put on record, in giving the History of the Origin of the Relief Church, otherwise it would be a mere shell without the kernel—a mere skeleton without the blood which circulated throughout all its veins.



In doing this I have nothing to do with party controversy, nor will I touch it. I will disturb the ashes of no man lying in his grave. The sword of the theological polemics carried on between the Relief and other churches, has been long rusting in its scabbard, and I cheerfully cast both sword and scabbard aside. With a sweet heart I shall strive to select and arrange in order, from the different publications of Hutchison, what was the creed and church order of the Relief denomination, and leave others to judge of them. I think they will bear examination. That is *my* opinion.

Mr. Hutchison, in giving 'A Compendious View of the Religious System taught by the Relief Synod,' did not intend, as he tells us, to give a description of all the doctrines and truths of the word of God, but only to condescend upon a few of the capital points, that others might know 'what was the strain of preaching among Relief ministers.' Short as his compend is, we intend to make it shorter still, and only to select a few points to show that their views were sound and scriptural on the doctrines of salvation by grace.

He lays it down as a general principle, that while the Sacred Volume is the standard of truth and error, the Relief Church adopts the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as containing a correct statement of what is the mind of the Spirit in the sacred page. At the same time he qualifies his approbation of them in some points very judiciously. When he speaks in his own name he is always to be understood as speaking in the name of his brethren. 'The Confession of Faith and Catechisms,' says he, 'composed by the venerable Westminster Assembly, contain a more complete collection of divine truths than any books of human composure I have ever seen: and, in my judgment, the Shorter Catechism is the most masterly, comprehensive, and judicious production of that venerable convention of divines. It contains a collection of divine truths so compendious, just, comprehensive, and well-connected, as is scarcely to be equalled in any human performance. But after all, that venerable assembly were not without their weaknesses and mistakes; and, indeed, they would

have been more than men if they had been free from them. Perfection, in a state of imperfection, is not to be expected. The distinctions between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world, and the right of private judgment in matters of religion, they did not well understand: and with all deference to these great men, I am humbly of opinion, that their views of religious covenanting were very erroneous, and also the methods of propagating the covenanted uniformity of religion in that age by civil pains.'

Passing over the existence of God—the oneness of his essence—a trinity of persons in the Godhead—the creation of man 'brightly adorned with the image of God,' we arrive at a leading doctrine,—the fall of man, on which the sentiments of the Relief Church are given in the following terms:—

'Man being formed after the image of God, and adorned with his fair resemblance, God entered into a covenant with him, as the public head of that numerous family, who were to spring from him by ordinary generation. For his accommodation, God placed him in paradise, where he had every thing entertaining to the sight, and pleasing to the taste, under the easy restriction of abstaining from the tree of knowledge of good and evil: which prohibition was intended to manifest his Creator's just authority over him, and to be the trial of his virtue and obedience. A severe threatening was denounced if he transgressed the royal mandate of heaven, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This threatening was equally to affect him and his posterity. At the same time, the threatening of death upon transgression implied a promise of life to Adam and his posterity, if he had performed the condition of the covenant, by yielding perfect and persevering obedience during the time appointed for the continuance of his probationary state. Had he kept the covenant, he and his offspring would have been confirmed, like the elect angels, in a state of unchangeable goodness. But being seduced by the devil, and the solicitation of his wife, he tasted the fruit of the prohibited tree, and hence the source of all our

woe. By the disobedience of this one man all his posterity are made guilty. Being their federal head, by the divine constitution, the sin he committed in that capacity is imputed to them, and they are as much exposed to the penal sanction of the covenant, as if they had committed the original transgression in their own persons. The death threatened in that primitive constitution was threefold, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. Accordingly, whenever Adam sinned, he lost his spiritual life, the image of God, and a power of living to him in holy obedience. The seeds of mortality were sown in his constitution, which gradually sprung up and strengthened in his frame, till they brought him to his original dust. And from the time of his transgression, he was exposed to eternal death.'

'As by virtue of Adam's federal representation his posterity were considered as one person with him in law, what took place with him holds also with them. The guilt of his fatal transgression was not only charged on him, but his soul was corrupted in all its faculties. His understanding was darkened, his will perverted, and his affections misplaced. And the very same is the situation of all his posterity; they have guilt *imputed* and sin *inherent*. Adam's sin is imputed to them, as he was their *federal head*, and corruption of nature is conveyed from him to them, as their *natural root* in the way of ordinary generation.'

The statement here given as to the violation of the covenant of works and the consequences thereof, is next followed by a compendious view of the nature of the covenant of grace. 'This better covenant is with peculiar propriety called the covenant of grace; because grace divinely rich and free was the original spring of it, and shines conspicuous in all its parts. As by the first covenant sin reigns to death, so by the new covenant grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ. The first covenant was made by God with *Adam*, as the public head of all his natural offspring. The second covenant was made by God with *Christ*, as the public head of all his spiritual seed; and in this respect Adam was the type of him that was to come.

The first Adam was bound to perform the *condition* of the covenant of works for all those whom he represented, and the second Adam was bound to perform the *condition* of the covenant of grace for all those whom he represented ; with this difference, that Adam was obliged, in point of duty, to engage for his posterity, when God *proposed* the covenant to him, whereas the Son of God was *disposed* to undertake the redemption of his people by the bowels of his own love.

‘ This covenant of peace was between the Father and the Son from eternity, and all the parts of this wondrous plan were adjusted with infinite wisdom, counsel, and discernment. It was an act of grace in the Father to *accept* of his own Son in this covenant, as the surety of sinners, as well as in the Son to become their surety. But though the first and second Adam agree in being federal heads, their *federal representation was not of equal extent*. Adam, in the first covenant, represented all his natural descendants. Christ, in the second, represents the elect only, or all those, who, from eternity, were given to him by the Father, to be redeemed from misery, and to obtain salvation with eternal glory. The rest of the human race were passed by in the decree of election ; and left to possess that heritage of wrath, to which they are born, as the descendants of Adam, and under the covenant of works. And no impeachment of the divine rectitude can arise from this, any more than from leaving the apostate angelic tribe to perish irretrievably in their sin. When reasonable creatures sin against God, the perfection of his nature requires that their sin should be punished according to its demerit, and if they never share in divine grace, it is what God is not their debtor to confer, who is free to do with his own as he pleaseth. And those who are the blessed objects included in the decree of election, are indebted for this inestimable privilege to the free and distinguishing grace of God, and not to any thing in themselves, or done by them in time. The love of Jehovah was the cause of their election ; their faith, love, repentance, and good works, are the fruits of election, and flow as necessarily from the great source of electing love as

beams of light issue from the sun. They were chosen in Christ as their new covenant head, that they might be holy, not because they *would* be holy.'

To carry this covenant into effect, it was necessary that the Son of God should become incarnate, and on this point the following doctrine was held:—'It was to accomplish the redemption of the chosen seed that the Son of God was, in the fulness of time, made flesh. He assumed the nature of those whom he was to redeem into union with his divine personality, that, being related to heaven in respect of his divinity, and to earth in respect of his humanity, he might more fitly be the day's-man between God and man, and perform the office of a mediator. The nature, which he assumed into union with himself, was perfectly holy, that it might be qualified for subsisting in union to his divinity, and for that obedience which he was to perform as our surety. He was not included in the federal representation of the first Adam, that he might be free from the imputation of his sin. He was conceived in a virgin's womb, by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, that he might be free from that depravity of nature, which is conveyed from Adam to his posterity by ordinary generation. A part of the virgin's substance was sanctified by the Holy Spirit, freed from all sinful pollution or tendency towards it, and separated or set apart for the holy purpose of forming our Lord's body. The particular manner in which the Holy Ghost accomplished this divine operation is veiled in mysterious secrecy, and where the Scriptures do not give us a key we are not at liberty to pick the lock.

'But though, by virtue of the act of assumption, our Lord united a real human nature to his divinity, he did not assume a *human person*. To constitute a human person, a true body and a reasonable soul must be united, and these must subsist *distinctly* by themselves. But it was otherwise with our blessed Lord; for, though he had a real human nature, a true body and reasonable soul united together, yet these never had a *separate subsistence of their own*; but from the very moment of his supernatural conception,



by the overshadowing Spirit, they subsisted in *union* to his divine personality as the Son of God. He has therefore a human nature, but one divine person for ever.'

Again, the end to be served by the Saviour's assumption of humanity was one of the very last importance. Here a clear and certain sound was given forth. 'The human nature which our Lord assumed, was richly supplied with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, to support and strengthen him in the course of his painful obedience and sufferings as the surety of his people. As their surety it became him to fulfil all righteousness. A twofold debt they owed, a debt of obedience, and a debt of punishment, neither of which they were able to pay. Both these debts were paid by him for them. His righteousness, which was the performance of the *condition* of the new covenant, consisted of three parts, the holiness of his nature, the purity of his life, and his sufferings from the sordid manger to the bloody cross. The law of God required the most perfect rectitude of soul, as well as perfect holiness of life, and the first in order to the last. Our Redeemer answered both these requisitions in the most perfect manner; for he was the holy thing born of a virgin, and in his life he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners. The first Adam was quickly overcome by the tempter and seduced into sin; but the second Adam was proof against all his temptations, and held fast his integrity till death put a period to a life of the fairest innocence, and of the most extensive usefulness, and advantage to mankind. By the spotless purity of his nature and life he paid that debt of obedience which his people owed, and by his sufferings, commencing at his birth and terminating in his death, he paid their debt of punishment. His sufferings for his people were *voluntary*; for he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and that they were not *eternal* was owing to the infinite dignity of the sufferer. The punishment due to the sins of his people he endured, in consequence of the *imputation* of them to him. As under the ceremonial dispensation there was a *typical translation* of the guilt of



the *literal Israel* to the victim, in consequence of which it was slain: so there was a *real translation* of the guilt of the *spiritual Israel* unto the Lamb of God, in consequence of which his blood was shed.'

Farther, it was in the character of the great High Priest over the House of God that Christ died to make an atonement for the sins of his people. And on this subject it was held,— 'His priestly office consisted of two parts,—to offer himself a sacrifice, and to make intercession. The first part of this office he performed on earth, in his unparalleled sufferings, which terminated in his death, when he offered to God his entire human nature, soul and body. His sacrifice was a perfect atonement for the offences of his people, committed against a Being infinite in all perfection, by virtue of the union of his humanity, which was the oblation to his divinity, the altar that sanctified the gift; for it was by the Eternal Spirit that he offered himself to God. And that his sacrifice was acceptable to the Father, appears from his appointing him to lay down his life, his declaration that he was well-pleased for his righteousness' sake, his resurrection from the gloomy grave, giving him glory and a kingdom, the promise of a numerous seed, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, after he ascended on high. If the sacrifice which he offered be considered in the extent of its intrinsic virtue and merit, it is sufficient to save all men, or ten thousand worlds; for merit that is infinite will extend to all possible redemption. But Christ never intended to save to the utmost extent of the merit of his death; he only intended by his death to save the election, or those whom the Father had given unto him. He died to purchase a *certainly* of salvation for this chosen seed, and not to procure a *possibility* of salvation for all, or to bring all men into a salvable condition.

'His intercession, which is the other branch of his priestly office, he is now performing within the veil. Having offered his sacrifice on earth, like the legal high priest, he went into the most holy place, where he appears in the Father's presence an Advocate and Intercessor. His intercession is

of the same extent with his death. For the elect only he died, and for them only he intercedes. He intercedes for those elected persons already brought into the covenant of grace, that they may be kept in it; and for those elect persons who are still in their natural condition, that they may be made believers, and brought home to their Father's house.'

Finally, Christ carries on the work of mediator in heaven for the purpose of conveying to his people the blessings of his purchase. They are all made to possess them in due season, and the following was held to be the mode in which he regenerates, justifies, and brings his people under the rule of holy obedience:—'The glorious gospel is the great and chief means which God the Spirit makes use of in bringing the elect into a state of salvation by Jesus Christ. No qualifications are required of sinners to *entitle* them to the gospel salvation, or to be the foundation of their right to believe in the Son of God. The calls, commands, and invitations of the word, are the ground of faith, and they are directed to mankind, as lost and perishing sinners of Adam's family. As every Israelite had a right to eat of the paschal lamb; to gather the manna in the wilderness; and if bit by the fiery serpents, to look to the brazen serpent for healing: so every sinner, whatever he has been, and whatever he has done, has a right to believe in Christ as the great ordinance of heaven for his salvation, and ought to consider the calls and invitations of the gospel so *particularly* directed to himself, as though they were not directed to any other person in the creation. It is the distinguished excellence and glory of the gospel, that it offers Jesus and his salvation, *fully and freely* to every sinner, who hears this joyful sound.

'But though no qualifications are required as the foundation of faith, but only the gracious declarations of the word, yet a sense and conviction of sin and misery is necessary in all those who believe. It is not necessary, as the ground of faith, but it is necessary to faith itself. For it must be observed, that a right to believe, and faith itself, are very different things. The one lies wholly in the *word*,

the other is seated in the *heart*. Many have a right to believe in the external invitation, but few in comparison improve this right into real faith. And even many convinced sinners perish without believing in Christ, as many of the Israelites who passed by the burning mount, died in the wilderness, and never entered the promised land. And of those whose convictions are of a saving nature, some have stronger convictions, some weaker, some are under them a longer, some a shorter time. Sometimes convinced sinners are long in the place of the breaking forth of children; at other times, as soon as Zion is in travail, she brings forth her sons, and a nation is born in one day: so diversified is the way of the Spirit in this mysterious and divine process.

‘But sooner or later, when convictions are saving, they issue in regeneration, which consists in an effectual supernatural change of the faculties of the soul. This gracious change is produced by the agency of the Spirit of Christ, and sinners are wholly passive, when it is effected. They may indeed be active in the use of appointed means, that they may obtain conversion, but the infusion of the heavenly nature in regeneration is wholly the work of the Spirit. They can no more produce the heavenly life in their souls, by any actions of their own, or improvement of their natural powers, than they could be the authors of their own creation, or that a man under the power of natural death, the prey of worms and corruption, can raise himself from the darksome grave, and perform the functions of natural life. When this change is effected, the soul does not receive any *new* natural faculties; for its faculties are essential to its nature, and though weakened, are not lost by sin. The soul is possessed of the same understanding, will, and affections, in every state of its being, as constituent parts of its nature. But in regeneration the old, natural, and essential faculties of the soul are renewed by the infusion and reception of new spiritual qualities. This change is also *universal* in the soul, and pervades all its faculties, and yet the whole soul is not renewed. In regeneration grace is perfect in its *parts*, but is not perfect in its *growth*. As when a child is

born into the natural world, he has all the members of a man, though these are but small at first, in comparison of what they will be in a state of manhood: so when the new creature is formed in the soul, it contains every grace really, in the seed and principle, though no grace is perfect in its degree.

‘Justification is another privilege of believers. Though *distinct* in its nature from regeneration, it is *inseparably* connected with it. Justification is a change of the sinner’s *state*, regeneration is a change of his *heart*. The one is an act of God without him, the other is the *work* of God within him. The one respects the *penalty* of the law, and the *punishment* which it threatens, the other respects the *precepts* of the law, and the *obedience* which it requires. In the one the believer is delivered from the *guilt* of sin, in the other from its *power*. In the one he has a *title* to heaven, and in the other a begun *meetness* for it.

‘The foundation of justification is the meritorious righteousness of the Divine Surety, exclusive of all qualifications in the person justified, or any works performed by him. The faith by which he is justified is of the operation of God, and it neither justifies by virtue of its *habit*, or existence in the soul as a grace of the Spirit, nor yet by its own act, as it is exercised by the soul; but it justifies as an instrument or hand of the soul, which it stretches forth to receive the gift of Christ’s righteousness, exhibited as the object of justifying faith in the word of grace, and claims an interest in it as its own. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner by God, at the time when it is received by faith. And when it is imputed to him, it is not infused into his nature, but in law reckoning, it is so placed to his account and it is as pleadable by him for acceptance with God and eternal life, as if it had been wrought out by him in his own person.

‘In justification the believer not only obtains a title to life, which he cannot lose again, but also a full, free, and irreversible pardon of all his sins. When he is justified, he is completely freed from the law, as a covenant of works,

both in its *precept and penalty*. He is freed from the precept of the law, as a covenant, because in the covenant of works the law's precept was prescribed to Adam as the foundation of a title to life, but it is not prescribed to the believer for this end in the gospel. But though the believer is freed from the precept of the law, in its federal form, as obedience to it is the foundation of a title to life, according to the nature and constitution of the covenant of works, yet he is not freed from its obligation, as it is the eternal rule of righteousness, resulting immediately from the all-perfect nature of the divine Lawgiver: for in this sense the law must have been the rule of obedience to man, though it had never been delivered to him in the form of a covenant; and in this sense the law is unalterable in its obligation, till the nature of the Lawgiver be changed, and man cease to be a subject of moral government. This natural law is taken into the gospel system, and is in the hand of Christ as Mediator, and it is obligatory on all his mystical members, not as in the old covenant that they may obtain a *title* to life by obeying it, but as the *rule* of their obedience: which obedience is at once the *evidence* of their title to life by faith in the Saviour's righteousness, and their *meetness* for the possession of eternal life, in respect of the frame and temper of their mind; for without holiness, in this sense, no man can see the Lord.'

Such are a few of the doctrinal and evangelical truths inculcated, as Hutchison says, 'by Relief ministers upon the people of their charge, the saving influence and energy of which they desire their hearers may experience upon their hearts, and then they doubt not but that they will be saved.' I have only selected a few from those he condescends on, but those who are acquainted with their Bibles and the analogy of faith, will be at no loss to conceive what the others must have been.

It was under the doctrine of Christ considered as King in Zion, that the peculiarities of the Relief Church properly consisted. A clearer distinction was now beginning to be discerned between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms



of this world than formerly, and they set up their denomination in the acknowledgment thereof. In the somewhat homely but expressive language of Hutchison,—they regarded the *kneading* together of the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world as a radical evil, and as the fruitful source of many of those things which had long distressed the consciences of men and produced divisions and animosities in the church of God. Their general views of the kingdom of Christ, or in other words of his Church as to its polity, were as follows:—

They held that the kingdom of Christ was twofold,—essential and mediatorial. ‘His essential kingdom is his by nature, as the Son of God, and equally belongs to him with the Father and Spirit. This kingdom is equally the natural right and property of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the powerful Creator, Preserver, all-wise, and righteous Governor of the universe. Christ’s essential kingdom is of vast extent; it extends to the whole universe of things, and commands every thing that hath being. Universal nature is subject to his control, and is disposed of by him, according to his pleasure. All creatures, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial, through the wide extent of creation, are the subjects of his government.’

Besides his essential kingdom as the Son of God, as IMMANUEL or God and man in one person,—‘he is invested with a delegated power and authority by the Father, for carrying into execution his mediatorial administration, till he present all his redeemed people faultless and spotless before the throne of God. The universal kingdom of providence and of grace is in the character of Mediator committed to him. His mediatorial kingdom, however, is more especially confined to the church. Here he rules, in the perfection of wisdom, clemency, and grace. As he is the author of the first creation, and universal governor, as God; so as Mediator, by special donation, he is placed at the head of the new creation; being made King in Zion, and head over all things, unto the church. He is her head of *government*, as by his mediatorial power, he gives her



an entire system of laws, suited to every state of her being. He is her head of *vital influence*, as he communicates, out of his own exhaustless fulness, the quickening, sanctifying, comforting, and establishing influences of his grace.'

Christ is the head of *government* in his church—and his government is absolute. It is governed entirely according to his will. The sole power of legislation being lodged in the person of the Prince, he by his own authority instituted and framed the whole policy, system of laws, form, and order of government in his kingdom. And if Messiah's kingdom be absolute, then none have a right to make new laws in his kingdom, to alter his laws, or to dispense with them. His laws are perfect, and therefore stand in no need of the addition of new human laws; for to add to any system of laws argues them to be imperfect before such addition is made. His laws are enjoined by his most sacred and divine authority, and they are not to be altered or dispensed with.

'Messiah the Prince has not left the government of his church in an ambulatory condition, to be one time Presbyterian, another Independent, a third Episcopalian. But the first of these, especially as to the great lines of it, was evidently observed in the constitution and practice of the first Christian churches, and is therefore to be observed in the church, in all ages. And it is also more agreeable to reason and common sense than any other form of ecclesiastical polity.

'The Lawgiver in Zion hath also instituted the two seals of the covenant, in the new-testament kingdom, *viz.* Baptism and the sacred supper, together with the terms and conditions of admission to these seals. The great scriptural condition of admission to the seals of the covenant is the reality of saintship, and the visibility of it. By the first, men are entitled to the seals of the covenant, in the sight of God, and, by the second, in the eye of the church. As the church is to judge of men, by their fruits or outward appearance, she may lawfully admit the vilest of men to her communion, if they are visible saints, and maintain

a fair outward profession and deportment; as their real, internal character is concealed from her view, and does not come under her rule of judgment. And, if she presumes to refuse the seals of the covenant to visible saints, she is equally guilty of mal-administration, as if she dispensed them to visible sinners. Her latitudinarianism, or deviation from the scriptural rule of judging, is equally great, when she shuts the door of her communion against those, who appear to be the children of God, by exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit to view, in a holy practice, as if she opened the door of her communion to the openly immoral and profane. It were to be wished those would attend to this who confine their communion to the votaries of their own party, and boldly exclude many precious saints in the sight of God, and visibly so before the world.

‘He hath also appointed the different orders of men, who are to bear office and administer the affairs in this kingdom. Some of these were extraordinary, as prophets, apostles, and evangelists. These were necessary for opening the Christian dispensation, and establishing the new-testament kingdom, and then their office was to expire. Others were ordinary and standing office-bearers in the church, as pastors and teachers, governments or ruling elders, and deacons, where they are necessary, for serving tables, and conducting, in a proper manner, the secular affairs of the church. These ordinary office-bearers are to be continued, in the church, to the end of the world. No other office-bearers are of divine institution. The various orders of men, in the church of Rome and the Episcopal church, are unknown in the kingdom of Christ, and are not constituted by divine, but by human authority.

‘The way, in which the office-bearers of this kingdom are to be installed in their office, is by election and ordination. Their election belongs to the members of the church, or the visible subjects of this kingdom. This is evident from the election of an apostle to supply the place of Judas, by the hundred and twenty disciples. It is evident from the election of the first deacons, by the multi

tude, and from the instalment of presbyters, teaching and ruling, after the multitude had chosen them, by the stretching out of hands. All these instances of popular elections are recorded in scripture, for the imitation of the church of Christ in after ages, and to point out the scriptural manner, in which the office-bearers in Messiah's kingdom, are to be chosen, to the end of the world. And, after they have been chosen, in a regular, scriptural manner, they are to be ordained or put into office, by the presbytery or rulers of the church.'

As to the power and authority of these office-bearers in Christ's kingdom—'Their power, (if they could be brought to understand and not to exceed it) is not legislative but ministerial. They have no power to give law to Christ's subjects. They have only an executive power, committed to them, of executing the laws and dispensing the ordinances of his appointment. In respect of public teaching, in the church of God, they are not at liberty to teach what they think proper, but what Messiah hath commanded them. And, in governing the church, they are not to do it, by laws of their own framing, but by a conscientious observance of the laws of his appointment.'

As a King, Christ has subjects, and the genuine subjects of Christ's kingdom are bought with his blood, and regenerated by his Spirit. 'All the subjects of Christ's kingdom were once his enemies, and engaged in rebellion against him. They were involved in the general apostasy of mankind from God, the great source of excellence, perfection, and glory, the gracious Author of their existence, preservation, and mercies, to whom they owed the highest homage, love, and subjection.' While thus they were enemies, Jesus in the riches of his grace, died for his subjects, that by his death he might make them his friends.

In making them his friends, He is seen as the Head of *influence* to his church. The great gift in the gospel economy is the gift of the Spirit. This is donated to Christ as Mediator by the Father, and he makes his enemies his subjects and friends by the agency of the Holy Ghost. In

effecting this happy revolution in the heart, the Spirit ordinarily begins to operate as a spirit of conviction, making sin to stand forth to the apprehension of the mind, in its nature, aggravations, and demerit, dragging the sinner, as it were, to the divine tribunal, and placing him, like the literal Israelites, at the foot of the burning mount, from whence he hears the fiery law thunder forth its awful denunciation, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.' And, after having operated, a longer or shorter time, and more or less sensibly, as a spirit of bondage unto fear, he begins to operate as a spirit of adoption, communicating himself, in his own proper nature to the soul, and impressing the moral nature or image of God upon it, filling it with spiritual light and all holy tempers and affections.'

These being the general outlines of the doctrine held by the Relief Church, as to the ordering of the kingdom of Christ in its various departments, under its Head, it can easily be conceived that these views of theirs influenced their opinions as to the relation which the gospel church occupied to the Old Testament church—the kingdoms of this world—the other denominations of Christians—and the covenants entered into in former times of sore persecution by the religious community of Scotland.

1st. The Relief denomination regarded the gospel church as very different in its nature from the Old Testament economy. The one they considered *voluntary*, while the other was in a great measure, *compulsory*.

'The Israelitish church, established in Palestine, was not a *voluntary* society, but the Christian church *is*. The Israelites were not left at liberty, whether they were to adhere to the Jewish religion or not. They were obliged to profess the true religion, and worship of God, established in Canaan; and such as apostatized to the worship of false gods were to be destroyed, by the express appointment of the great Head of the theocracy. No strange god was to be set up among them, in that peculiar spot of earth, where he had established his own worship. The Jewish

church, however, was a voluntary society with respect to proselytes from Gentilism. None of the Gentiles were to be *forced* to profess the Jewish religion, like native Israelites. But such of them as became *willing* converts to it, were to be received. And this is the case with Christ's new-testament kingdom; it is a *voluntary* society, consisting of men of all nations, kindreds and tongues, who by their own consent and choice enter into it. The gospel-church has its gates open to receive all, who *voluntarily* enter into it. Christianity proposes blessings unto men, great in their number, precious in their nature, durable as eternity, and with a divine freedom; but it punishes none, in the outward man, for not becoming its votaries. Its language, alluring and awful to all that hear it, is, "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." It exhibits every thing amiable, beneficent, and excellent to captivate the hearts of men, and make them its votaries by their own consent. And it denounces endless misery, in the future life, upon all who will not embrace it. But it requires no man to profess it *contrary* to his own inclinations. It recommends itself to the esteem and approbation of mankind, by its own internal light and evidence, its amiable excellencies, and that numerous train of blessings temporal and eternal, which it brings along with it; for it has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. And, if it is despised, it leaves men to the mournful consequences of their own folly and unbelief. But it rejects the absurd aid of the civil sword; nor is it so rude and uncourteous as to force itself upon men, by *civil penalties*, in a greater or less degree. Such things are not the weapons of its warfare. Such carnal weapons are excellently adapted to the carnal and worldly genius of the Mahometan and Antichristian kingdom; but, in Messiah's kingdom, they are unknown; it neither needs them, nor can admit them, nor have its interests ever been promoted by them.

'The truths of the gospel will make their way in the world, by their own internal beauty, excellence, and im-



portance, and the energy of the Spirit of grace attending them, without the absurd, irrational, and heterogeneous power of the sword, would men only learn the wisdom, to suffer the kingdom of Christ to remain distinct from the worldly kingdoms, and fight its battles by weapons that are not carnal, but spiritual like itself. That church-state, or establishment of religion, which is constituted by human authority, or cannot consist without it, is not from Christ, it is not his kingdom, nor has the least connection with it. It is only a worldly kingdom, or political constitution, framed and established by church and state-politicians, which Messiah the Prince will never acknowledge for his kingdom; for his kingdom he has established himself to stand through all ages, and has not left it to be framed and constituted by states or churches.'

2d. The kingdom of Christ, as stated in the preceding sentence, was held to be perfectly distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and the one was not to interfere with the other.

'In all matters of religion, and the worship of God, Christians are not the subjects of worldly kingdoms, but of the kingdom of Christ. As they are *members* of the church of Christ they *belong* to a community entirely *different* from the civil state; a community standing upon a different basis, under a different system of laws, and form of administration, and constituted for very different ends. In all matters of faith, conscience, and the worship of God, every man is to judge for himself. In such matters, he is to call no man master on earth, nor to subject his faith and conscience to the dictates of men. These are things too sacred and lie too near the foundation of religion, to be intermeddled with. None have a right to usurp dominion over the faith and consciences of men. The inspired apostles themselves claimed no such power over Christians in their day. These venerable, holy men inculcated the rights of conscience and private judgment in their excellent writings, and sacredly observed them in their practice. To commit depredations on the rights of conscience was left



to the pretended vicar of Christ, and those succeeding ages of despotism, which have disgraced the annals of the church, and stained them with barbarity, carnage, and blood; but, in the primitive apostolic age, they were unknown in the church itself, whatever injuries she sustained from other quarters.

‘It is every man’s duty to *search* the scriptures for himself, to learn from them the mind of Christ, for his own salvation, and not to receive *implicitly* the doctrines which men teach, or the creed of the civil magistrate. The meanest subject in the state has as good a right to judge, in matters of religion, for himself, as the prince on the throne. The civil magistrate has no *more right* to dictate a religious creed to his *subjects*, than they have a *right* to dictate a religious creed to *him*. By being placed at the head of the civil state, to give law to the subjects of the state, he is not therefore placed at the head of the church, to give law to the body of Christ. If ever he assumes this character and power, he transgresses the just limits of his authority, which is *civil*, not *religious*; invades the dominions of *another* prince; and arrogantly claims the power of giving laws to a community, that knows, and ought to know, *no* king but Jesus. This is a stretch of prerogative as unreasonable and absurd, as it would be for the French king to pretend to give law to the British subjects, or for the king of Britain to assume the power of prescribing laws to the subjects of a foreign prince.

‘Every civil magistrate ought to have a power of judging, in matters of religion, for himself, for this belongs to him as a man and a Christian, and therefore he ought not to be *deprived* of it by becoming a magistrate. But as, by becoming the supreme magistrate, he does not lose the unalienable right of judging for himself in religious matters: so, by being raised to supremacy in the state, he acquires *no* right over his subjects, to *prescribe* to them in matters of religion, or to interfere with the sacred rights of Christians, to regulate their faith, conscience, and religious worship, according to the information and conviction of truth

and duty, which they have received from the word of God. In these things the conscience is sacred to God, the alone Lord of the conscience: and Christians, in these matters, are accountable only to Christ, as their Master and Lord, and must stand or fall by his judgment. As the civil magistrate is a member of the church, he is not a *ruler*, but a *subject* of Christ's kingdom; and, if he is a good man, he will account this a higher honour and privilege, than to be the head of the civil state. As he is a member of the church, he is upon the same footing with other Christians. The *meanest* subject of Christ's kingdom has as good a right to all the privileges of it, as the *greatest* prince on earth; for here is no respect of persons, and no man is known after the flesh.

‘Though in matters of religion, and things pertaining to the law of their God, Christians are the subjects of Christ's kingdom, and not of the civil state; yet, in things pertaining to this life, and the outward man, they are the subjects of the worldly kingdom, and in these things the civil magistrate has a right to command, and to be obeyed. The law of Christ commands all the subjects of his kingdom to be subject to every ordinance of man. By which is meant, a cheerful and ready obedience to all those ordinances of the civil magistrate, that are of a lawful nature, fall within his jurisdiction as the head of the state, and do not interfere with their rights as Christians, and members of the church of Christ. While their consciences are to be kept sacred to the Lord of hosts, their bodies, services, and worldly goods, are subjected to the temporal prince. They must support his person and government, and give him all due respect and honour, as the supreme head of the state, by paying taxations, engaging in lawful war, and performing all other duties obligatory upon them, as subjects of the worldly kingdom. And all the lawful commands of the civil magistrate they must obey, from conscience, and from a conviction, that it is the will of the great Christian Law-giver, that they should do so, and not merely from fear of

outward punishment, in their persons or substance, if they do not.'

Earthly kings indeed owe a duty to the church. But how? 'Earthly kings may be nursing fathers, and their queens nursing mothers to the church, without interfering with the rights of her members. By their own example they may recommend religion to their subjects. They may exert their influence in promoting the interest of Christ's kingdom a great variety of ways, without abridging the rights of conscience, and private judgment, in matters of religion. They may encourage piety, by promoting good men to offices in the state, and withholding them from bad men. They may be fathers to their people, and guardians of their religious and civil liberties, by preserving church and state from foreign enemies, and not suffering one part of their subjects to oppress and disturb the rest, in the quiet and peaceable possession of their rights, as men and as Christians. But, if they countenance one part of their subjects, in harassing and distressing the rest, as was too much the case in the cruel state-uniformities of the last century, they are rather tyrants, than nursing fathers and mothers to the church, as they invade the sacred prerogative of Christ, and the rights of his people. And every such invasion is a step towards the overturning of their throne.'

3d. In regard to other churches around them, the Relief held it unlawful to hear legal and unsound preachers who overturned in their discourses the doctrines of grace,—and also to hear intruders who had violently thrust themselves into particular charges in the church of Christ, and who by so doing had at once robbed Christ of his *authority*, and his people of their *liberty*. They also considered it wrong in those who had put themselves under the inspection of a faithful minister, not to wait with regularity upon his ministrations. But still while they held these doctrines, and in the spirit of them had endeavoured to form themselves into a distinct denomination, they also avowed their

readiness to hold occasional communion, both lay and ministerial, when circumstances required it, with all *visible saints*. They held that the terms of admission to, and exclusion from, the Lord's supper, and the other seal of the covenant, were unalterably fixed by the great Head of the Church himself, and were to be learned from his word alone.

'He hath not left these to be framed, changed, diminished, or augmented, by the arbitrary appointments of men. The office-bearers in his house have only the execution of that system of government and laws committed to them, which he hath appointed. As in respect of doctrine they are to teach all things that Christ hath commanded; so in their judicative capacity, they are sacredly bound to observe that order and discipline, which he hath appointed to be observed in his church, till his second coming. The under shepherds have no right, by their own authority, to admit or exclude from sealing ordinances, in his church, but only to *declare* and *faithfully* to observe the terms of church-fellowship, which he hath appointed. And because men in their different generations are so unhappily disposed, in this and other points, to deviate so widely from the revealed will of Christ, it is remarkable, that he concludes both Testaments with a very *serious caution* to the church against such deviations. The last injunction, which he delivered unto the Old Testament church, we have Mal. iv. 4. "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb, for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." And Rev. xxii. 18, 19. we have his parting declaration to the New Testament church: "For I testify unto every man, that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book." As therefore if it is so dangerous to deviate from the revealed will of

Christ, it must be so particularly in the affair of church communion. And on this *great point* the churches will do well to take heed to what the Spirit saith to them, rather than to the dictates or practices of fallible men.

‘All men, as they are the sinful and perishing descendants of Adam, have a right to hear the gospel, because Christ himself gave his apostles, and in them, all ordinary ministers after them, a commission to go into all the world, and preach the gospel unto *every creature*. This *unlimited commission*, given, by the chief Shepherd, to *all* his under shepherds, joined with his own *general invitations*, “Look to me and be saved all the ends of the earth;” “Ho every one that thirsteth, come to the waters;” “Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out;” gives all men a right to hear the gospel, and to believe in him, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, wise and foolish, sober and profane, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, sensible and insensible sinners.

‘But though all men, as sinners, have a right to the *gospel* feast, none but believers, in the sight of God, have a right to the *sacramental* table. This table is covered with children’s bread, and therefore none but children have a right to it. It is a feast prepared by the glorious bridegroom of the church for his spouse: for all those, who have *matched* with him, and by faith taken hold of the everlasting covenant. It is an ordinance, intended to seal the benefits of the covenant to believers, to strengthen and confirm their graces; but it is not a *converting* ordinance, nor intended to be the means of communicating the spiritual life to the soul. It is graciously intended to be the food of the *new nature*, but not the mean of *implanting* that nature.

‘And as none but believers have a right to the holy supper, in the *sight of God*: so *all believers* have this right. Being *all equally* the children of God, they have the same *common* title to the *children’s bread*. Let it be remembered that the righteousness of Christ, graciously imputed and received by faith, is the *alone* foundation of the believer’s



title to this ordinance, and all the other peculiar privileges of the covenant of grace. But this righteousness is *equally* imputed to *every* child of God, and embraced by a faith of the divine operation, and therefore *all* his children have the same fundamental title to the children's bread. And though they may communicate unworthily, if the oil in their lamps be not burning, if their graces be not in exercise, yet this does not invalidate their *title* to the Lord's table, which is not founded in their *graces* or *frames*, but in their *justification*, by Immanuel's righteousness. In such a case they are disqualified in point of *frame* for a *right* participation of this ordinance, but this no more forfeits their *title* to it, than by failing in the right performance of any duty, they lose their interest in the new covenant itself, or their title to the blessings it contains: a most comfortable reflection!

‘ Having now shown that it is *real saintship* that entitles men to the sacred supper, *in the sight of God*, I next observe that it is the *visibility* of saintship *before the world*, that entitles men to communion in the *eye of the Church*. The truth of saintship, or the reality of Christianity, in the heart, is known only with absolute certainty to God himself who searches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men. It is according to the *real* state and character of men that Christ now forms his judgment of them, and will judge them at the last day. But it is according to the *visibility* of their character, before the world, that the church is to form her judgment concerning them. The church is to judge of professors, not by their internal character, for this is the sacred prerogative of the Lord Almighty, but by their outward character. It is the *fruits* of professors, or what they *appear* to be, that constitutes the rule of the church's judgment, in admitting them to, or excluding them from, the seals of the covenant.

‘ Perfect unanimity in *every* thing, in religion, is not necessary to Christian fellowship. It appears from many passages of scripture, that it is the duty of Christians both to study to know the entire system of divine truths, and to



attain as much as possible to unanimity of sentiment and judgment in these things. But when the different capacities, and circumstances of men, their various connections, forms of education, and opportunities of improvement, are attended to, especially in a state of imperfect knowledge, it is scarcely to be expected, that ever Christians will be entirely of the same mind, in *every* thing in religion. Perfect unanimity of sentiment will be the attainment of the church *triumphant*; but it is rather to be desired than attained in the *militant* state of the church. But church-communion, in scripture, is not suspended on this condition.

‘It is a *mean, unworthy prostitution* of this solemn ordinance of our religion to call it the table of a party. It is the *Lord’s* table. For whom is this table covered by the generous entertainer? Is it covered for Burghers, or Anti-burghers? for Church-people, or Relief-people? for Independents or Episcopalians as such? No: for whom then? For the *children of God*, not as they belong to any *particular denomination* of professors, but as they are *his* children, in *reality*, and *appear* to be so, by their deportment.’

4th. The Relief Church as a church was opposed to the duty of national covenanting, as being of a moral and religious nature. In accordance, however, with the comprehensive principles of communion just stated, they never made their views on this point a term of church fellowship. Some of their ministers were avowed and conscientious covenanters, and published defences of the practice. The general views of the body are contained in the following sentences, extracted from the writings of Hutchison, and given in his own name that he might not compromise his brethren who thought differently from him. ‘I readily grant, that it is the duty of all men, to whom the gospel is made known, to enter into God’s covenant of grace, by believing in his Son, and to yield a cheerful obedience to his laws. And, if nothing is pled for, as national covenanting under the gospel, but this, I have no objections to it, but cordially wish that all the kingdoms of this world

would, in this manner, become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. But many plead, that it is a moral duty, under the gospel, to swear religious oaths and covenants literally, as the Israelites did. This kind of covenanting I cannot see to be either a moral or positive duty, under Christianity.'—'Swearing of public religious oaths was never observed by good men in all the ages of the world, before the constitution of the church of Israel; no such oaths were sworn by the Saviour, by his apostles, or the primitive churches planted by them. In the New Testament there is a total silence about swearing religious oaths. Such arguments against the moral obligation of public religious oaths appear very strong and convincing to me, and I doubt not but they will appear in the same light to all dispassionate, unprejudiced men, who wish to have their judgment determined in this controversy, by clear and conclusive arguments from Scripture and right reason, and not by an implicit belief of the dictates and practices of men.'—'National bonds and confederacies, however, may be entered into—when they are political, and not part of religious worship—when persons enter into them by consent and choice, and not by force and constraint,—and when the matter of the league is consistent with the civil and religious liberties of men; and I rejoice to see the eyes of the nation beginning to discover the propriety of forming such political confederacies when they are necessary, without interfering with the religious or civil liberties of one another. Were the inhabitants of Scotland to enter into political combinations of this kind with prudence, spirit, and unanimity, in circumstances of great national danger and distress, the nation would stand forth with energy, and appear a formidable body against its oppressors. But, when one party in the nation will force all the rest into their religious creed, as was the case in the last century, the kingdom is divided against itself, it has an internal consumption in itself, and has little power to oppose the lawless depredations of its oppressors.'

Such is a kind of arranged summary of the principles

held by the Relief Church at her origin. They were considered by many liberal, enlightened, scriptural. It were easy indeed to select from the writings of the originators of the Relief cause particular expressions dropt casually here and there in their pages, which show that they did not fully perceive how far their principles would carry them, and also to convict them of not fighting very directly the battles of modern dissent against the endowments of the State. But why should this have been expected of them? They were not omniscient. The evil in their day was the State withholding a full toleration of religious opinion, exercising unmitigated patronage, and punishing men for what it esteemed heresy; and against all civil pains and oppression for the sake of conscience, they lifted a manly and indignant voice. They might in theory look forward to the time 'when the ministers of the Church of Scotland would be found preaching the pure uncorrupted doctrines of the gospel and *asserting the liberties* of Christians, and then they would fall back into her bosom,' and thus cherish a delusive dream as to a future union, while yet all the while the principles of the one and of the other were rapidly diverging from each other, and settling into conscientious and steady opposition. In less than sixteen years after the first controversial warfare, another Relief minister (Smith) passing over the same field as Hutchison, and showing that the kingdom of the Messiah differs from the kingdoms of this world in its origin, members, government, and purposes of erection, pronounces the alliance of Church and State altogether incompatible in the following vigorous terms:—'The church is catholic, composed of all the faithful in Christ Jesus scattered abroad over the face of the earth; of the redeemed out of every kindred, tribe, and nation; of all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus out of a pure heart, and love him in sincerity and truth. These, and these only, are the children of the kingdom, and are all brethren, however they may be distinguished from one another by birth, language, complexion, education, station, local situation, or other accidental circum-

stances. This is the church of Christ; and its catholic nature shows at first view that it cannot be thrown into any national or provincial mould. Yet in nations where the Christian religion has been generally professed, princes and states have thought proper to interpose their authority, by attempting to give it a civil establishment, which it is not capable of receiving. For what in effect have these boasted guardians of religion, and affectionate nurses of the church established, or can they establish, that is, enforce by their authority? Not the original plan of that grace which hath appeared unto men bringing salvation; that must stand on the basis of divine institution, and its own intrinsic excellence; and it is calculated to be the religion of every man for himself voluntarily chosen and voluntarily professed, on which its whole value and efficacy depend; not to be the religion of civil communities, as such, and enforced by their authority, for they are not capable of it. But on examination it will be found that the civil powers (while they pretended to establish Christianity) have only established peculiar forms of professions, and particular sects of professing Christians, giving them an outward sanction, and granting them certain exclusive civil privileges, and when thus embodied nick-naming them the Church. The church by law established! What a pompous title! What a glorious privilege! How secure are they who are within her consecrated pale! High is their dignity. They are the *best* citizens, and the *only* Christians! Worthy therefore of the civil patronage they receive. Their creed, their ritual, their understandings, their wills, their consciences, are all stamped with the great seal of civil authority! They have surely reason to rejoice that they are authorized to be Christians, and that they have received a patent which warrants them to worship their Maker! Oh the blasphemy! Oh the daring impiety!

## CHAPTER VII.

### DISPUTES ABOUT FREE COMMUNION.—CONCLUSION.

THE article in their system on which the Relief fathers more than on any other took their stand, was the doctrine of *communion among all visible saints*. There can be no doubt that Whitefield by his visits and preaching in Scotland had to a great extent broken down the old Presbyterian hedges of limited communion, and compelled many of the lovers of Jesus to seek his warm-hearted fellowship, even although he was an Episcopalian. His *shovel* hat was found to cover the very prince of preachers and the best of men; and as he was ready to take to his heart all the friends of the Saviour, the Presbyterians of Scotland were constrained, thousands of them, to reciprocate his Christian liberality. Converted as many of them were under his ministry, how could they refuse to confess him to be their father in Christ? As both Gillespie and Bain had co-operated with him in his revivals in Scotland, they had imbibed much of his spirit, and strove after his pattern that unto their church all should be received whom Christ had received.

In this they gloried, and eventually no doubt it served a good end, and tended to diffuse a kindly spirit through the religious mind of Scotland, which had been sadly soured and shrivelled by Popish and Prelatic persecution: but in the first instance it was their weakness and sore discouragement. It helped to make them a target to be shot at by all other parties. It was very easy to say that free communion was indiscriminate communion. Among themselves there were both ministers and people who strenuously pled that the terms of communion should not be 'visible

sainthood,' but 'visible sainthood among Presbyterians.' This at the time would have been the most politic policy for their success as a party, but the leading persons among them having got hold of the great Scripture fact that the Lord's supper is to be spread for the Lord's people, would not go backward even for the purpose of increasing their popularity. Where they had planted their feet they resolved to stand.

At the very first meeting which took place between the eastern and western Presbytery (1772), to consult whether they should constitute themselves a Synod, the question as to their terms of communion was introduced as a matter on which they were divided. When the sons of God met together, this question, like an evil spirit, appeared in the midst of them. Cruden of Glasgow and Cowan of Colingburgh, wished ministerial and Christian communion restricted to Presbyterians who were visible saints. 'A motion was made by Mr. Cowan, desiring to know the mind of the meeting, with respect to holding ministerial and Christian communion with those of the Episcopal and Independent persuasion; and with respect to those who are unsound in the essentials of the Christian faith; particularly by their publications to the world.

'With respect to the last of these, the meeting unanimously agreed, that their principles did not allow them to hold communion with such.

'With respect to the other, viz. ministerial or Christian communion occasionally with those of the Episcopal or Independent persuasion, the meeting being of different opinions, put a vote; Hold communion with those of the Episcopal or Independent persuasion occasionally, upon supposition always, that they are by profession visible saints, or not? And the roll being called, and votes marked, it carried, Hold communion. And therefore the meeting find it agreeable to the principles of the Presbytery of Relief to hold communion occasionally with such.'\*

\* 'A Just View,' &c., p. 14.



The subject was again taken up at the first meeting of Synod, 1773, when the members of court, after having had the matter a year before them, gave a deliberate and unanimous judgment on their terms of communion as a religious denomination. 'With respect to the overture concerning ministerial and Christian communion, the Synod were unanimously of opinion that it is agreeable to the word of God and their principles, occasionally to hold communion with those of the Episcopal and Independent persuasion who are visible saints.\*' This decision, unanimously and deliberately come to, and so entirely different from the modern principles of the Church of Scotland, the two branches of the Secession, and the Cameronians, was kindling the torch of war amongst all the religious professors of the land. By many of the adherents of the Relief it was gloried in as the dawning of a better day for the torn and bleeding church of Christ; but by others, and particularly by other religious denominations, it was considered as subversive of all church order, and as impiously *relieving* men from those sacred national vows and covenants which were binding upon them. Hold communion with Episcopal and Independents! These were the very parties against whom the Solemn League and Covenant was framed. The whole country, therefore, rang with 'latitudinarian, unscriptural terms of communion.' To stem the strong tide which was setting in from various quarters against the Synod, the Rev. Mr. Neil, Anderston, in 1773, published a discourse on the Nature of Christian Communion, in which he endeavours to cast oil upon the troubled waters, and vindicate the principles of catholic communion on the authority of Christ. 'In the Church of England,' says he, 'there have been, and still are, ministers as well as private Christians eminently pious,—sound in the great doctrines of the gospel,—zealous for their God and Saviour's interests, and in promoting the salvation of lost sinners. Were such ministers providentially in this country for a while, and express their earnest

\* Synod Minutes, p. 4.

desire to preach or join with us in the sacrament of our Lord's Supper, in the manner that we celebrate that sacred solemnity in this church, have we a warrant from the word of God to refuse, at least, such occasional communion with them, because they have not the very same views of these ceremonies as we have? or suppose men of another denomination, such as the great Dr. Owen, Goodwin, &c., in the last century, and the late Dr. Watts, Doddridge, &c.,—men singularly endowed by heaven with grace and holiness, of extensive learning, by which they were qualified to be burning and shining lights in the church of Christ, and though they be dead, are yet speaking for God in their inestimable writings; and many, through the divine blessing, are receiving spiritual and eternal benefit by them,—if these holy and great men were alive, or if any, like them, should offer to join with us in the ordinances of the gospel, if we should reject them because their views of church government were not the same with ours, for any thing that appears to me from the divine records, we might justly expect such a reprimand from our final Judge as this,—By what authority did you refuse to hold communion with my servants? and who gave you that authority?''\*

Appeals, however, to Scripture or to Christian candour were in a great measure lost. The old doctrine of covenanted uniformity had still a strong hold over a great portion of the public mind. Cowan had stirred his people to rebel against the Synod on account of the 'monstrous classing of Presbytery, Episcopacy, and Independency.'† In Glasgow, Cruden followed the same tactics. He factioned also with the vacant congregation of Bellshill, and endeavoured to get Mr. Bell from Jedburgh, as its pastor. Some of the elders complained to the Presbytery, and the scheme failed. Having been frustrated in his plans, he absented himself from the meeting of Synod, 1773, and from all the meetings of the Glasgow Presbytery, which, on the petition

\* 'Discourse on the Nature and Necessity of Christian Communion,' p. 14.

† Celingsburgh Minute Book.

of the Anderston Session, was now remodelled, and appointed to meet at Glasgow instead of Dunfermline. He took no share in its business, and was appointed to preach in none of its vacancies. In a fretted and factious spirit he continued his ministry among his people till 1774, when he left them, went to London, and advised them to go back to the Establishment. Some years after this he returned on a visit to Glasgow, and made no secret in acknowledging to some of his former congregation, that he had done wrong; but said he,—‘I was deceived.’

Amid these troubles and convulsions, the Synod could not allow their principles of communion to remain, like an axiom, on their Minute Book, without some farther explanation of its meaning. They were compelled to speak out. Their churches required to be enlightened. The religious public would not permit the matter to rest.

When the Synod, therefore, met in June, 1774, they drew up and adopted an explanation and defence of their former judgment for the use of their churches. ‘The Synod being informed that their late judgment with respect to ministerial and Christian communion, first given at the consultative meeting, at the desire of Messrs. Cruden and Cowan, had been mistaken by some and misrepresented by others, to the disturbing of several congregations, and the stumbling of well-disposed people; the Synod, therefore, think themselves bound to give an explanation, and fully express their sense of said judgment.’

1. ‘They say, As our opinion with respect to that great article of the communion of saints, we presumed, had been no secret, it would not have occurred to us, to have delivered our mind upon it, had not the importunity of the above two members induced us to it.

2. ‘We have been mistaken and misrepresented exceedingly, either by the weak, or the designing, who have thought as if in that judgment of ours, we had not been of the same mind with what is expressed in the 26th chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, sections first and second, where our opinion of that important point is fully

set forth, and the doctrine contained therein is accordingly adopted by us. Nor have we been less injured by any who have alleged, as if by that judgment we had opened a door to fellowship with the unsound in the essentials of the Christian faith, or the immoral; or even with the Episcopalians in their hierarchy and unscriptural ceremonies; or with Independents in their peculiar notions of church government. While, at the same time, we scruple not to affirm, because we believe there are of both these denominations, who, from the most satisfying marks, appear to be received by Christ; and therefore we dare not deny them.—Though, when they join in communion with us, we do not conform to them, but they to us.

3. 'It is perverting, not the spirit only, but the very letter of our judgment, to say, that any little difference in our practice, relative to that point, subjected to censure: members being left at liberty to judge, in particular circumstances, what should be most for edification: Or, in other words, that this our sentence does not so bind to conformity, as that difference in opinion or practice should make us decline communion one with another.

'Upon the whole, the Synod think it their duty to exhort those under their inspection, not to be soon staggered by unfavourable reports that may be spread, either by the mistaken, or the malicious: to be on their guard against such as may zealously affect them, but not well; and that they preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'\*

They were now thoroughly committed to these principles, and though they had been willing, it was impossible to shirk or shun their discussion, if any one from the press should fairly and honestly assail them. The coming conflict speedily began. Through many a fierce pamphlet it ran till the liberalizing influence of Bible and Missionary societies swallowed it entirely up, as Jonah was swallowed up in the waves of the sea, and now there is a perfect calm. The danger is now on the side of a spurious liberality, and not

\* 'Just View,' pp. 14, 15.

of a bigotted uniformity. The old landmarks between saving truth and soul-destroying error are in danger of being pulled up. Where is the apostolic jealousy now of works mingling with faith in the article of a sinner's justification before God being made a term of communion?

After the terms of communion were settled and disposed of in Synod, Messrs. Cruden and Cowan were both separated from the body; and the rest being one in opinion, faith, and practice, proceeded as a Synod to carry forward their cause and to organize churches on these acknowledged principles. The venerated Fathers of the Church of Relief in the face of Scotland, humbly yet firmly proclaimed themselves the friends of TRUTH, LIBERTY, and LOVE, and strove as opportunity offered to form Christian Societies wherein these things were preached, practised, and maintained.

There were two great mistakes which as a religious party they committed, and which tended greatly to prevent their increase: no doubt they partly sprung from their dislike of bigotry and sectarianism, but certainly they allowed their fear of these evils to be prejudicial to themselves. First, they set up no institutions for the training of young men for the ministry, but trusted to accessions from other denominations, or confided in the perilous peradventure that students would go to college from their churches, have themselves educated and trained at the theological halls of the national universities, and then come and present themselves at the tables of their Presbyteries as candidates for the office of the ministry among them. They should at once have seen that these were precarious and slow sources of supply; and, accordingly, many a town and parish where *Relief* was needed from error and oppression, and eagerly sought at their hand, never was occupied, because the labourers were few. The fields were white unto the harvest, but no reapers were thrust forth to cut down and collect the precious grain. It was not till 1820 that this defect was remedied, by the institution of a Relief Divinity Hall, and before that time the Church of Scotland was striving eagerly to regain the ground which she had lost.



Another mistake of the early Relief Fathers was their resolution not to go to any quarter to plant their standard, unless they were invited by the people of the district. They refused to act upon the aggressive system. They were afraid to disturb the peace of the country, and to lay themselves open to the charge of being intruders. It would have been well if they had felt more deeply the force of the Saviour's charge,—‘Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ It was not every portion of the oppressed heritage of God that had persons of determination and substance among them who could or would take upon themselves all the responsibilities of inviting a new party to the place and rearing a new place of worship. Thus it was that a shyness on the part of the originators of the Relief Church kept them even from knowing the earnest wish of many a locality—‘Come over and help us.’ Alas! help never came from them, and churches were never set up where they were very much needed. A tithe of the proselytizing spirit of modern times would have been a blessing to them.

With all their errors and mistakes, however, (and what church is spotless?) they nobly sustained their cause, and greatly increased. They were not unfrequently preferred to others, just because they were peaceful, and would prove a cement rather than a wedge to divide the Christian community. The country required such a party at the time, and they were raised up to meet its wants.

As I said towards the close of my History of the Relief Church written in 1839, so do I say still. ‘The age required that witnesses should be raised up at the time on behalf of sound doctrine, catholic principles of communion, and the right of the Christian people to choose their own office-bearers, and they were provided by the King of Zion at the fit season. The Relief church, on the one hand, tended greatly to put an end to all mobbing and rioting, at the settlement of unpopular parish ministers, by simply opening up, at a small expense, a plan of *relief* from the galling yoke of patronage; and, on the other hand, it tended to



check the other Dissenting Bodies in Scotland in the party terms of communion into which they had been unhappily driven by untoward circumstances, and to bring them back to the broad platform on which the Erskines had first organized their church. If the Relief has suffered considerably because she has been defective in denominational ardour, others have reaped largely the advantage of it. Instead of being the *bone* of contention, she has been the *cement* which has bound together the living stones in the temple of God. She acknowledged those on the right and left hand, as brethren, who would not acknowledge each other, and thus strove successfully to promote unity and peace. Her principles of free communion have often been urged against her, but in many quarters they have also pled for her, and procured for her friends, where the people loved the pure gospel rather than party peculiarities. At this era (1839), the solitary church of 1752 has multiplied and increased into the goodly number of 115, many of them also being among the largest churches in Scotland. Her ministers have preached the gospel faithfully and affectionately to thousands of grave attentive worshippers. As a body they have been void of ostentation. They have held on, as useful clergymen should do, in the noiseless tenor of their way, and been much given to cultivate humility and peace. Their voice, as enthusiasts or noisy disputants, has seldom or never been heard in the land.

According to their number and means they have uniformly countenanced the claims of civil and religious liberty, and equally stood in the breach when the citadel of freedom was assailed by despotism or licentiousness. They have allowed no Diotrephes in their churches to monopolize the privileges of the people of God. Bible, missionary, and charitable societies have all obtained their countenance and aid. Sabbath schools and congregational libraries are to be found throughout all their borders. Scarcely a church in the denomination is without them. In accordance with their catholic principles, they have patronized those missionary societies most that are founded

on a liberal basis. Several of their licentiates are labouring with success as missionaries in connection with the London and Glasgow African Missionary Societies. A very considerable number of their young ministers have gone both to Canada and the United American States, but they have never thought of setting up a party in either of these countries, as the American presbyterian church is so entirely formed on Relief principles, and receives Relief licentiates at once into her bosom. Relief ministers, in all places wheresoever they reside, are like corner-stones to lay hold on other living stones, and build and bind together the whole church of the redeemed into one beautiful whole.

Ever after the union of the two portions of the Secession church in 1820, which was so happily consummated on scriptural grounds, an impression was produced both on the mind of the United Secession church and of the Relief, that a union between them was desirable and practicable, and that sooner or later it would take place. In May, 1821, the Relief Synod passed a resolution, mainly suggested by the union of the two branches of the Secession, which they took care to have published in the newspapers. The tenor of which was—"The Synod view with much interest and pleasure the spirit of union and conciliation manifested by different Presbyterian bodies, and anticipate with confidence a period, which they trust is not far distant, when difference of opinion, on points of minor importance and on which mutual forbearance should be exercised, shall no longer be a ground of separation and party distinction." Ever after this period both Synods cultivated those things that made for peace—ceased from controversial attacks—considered the erection of rival altars as unseemly—and all these things without any convention or compact. Like the larger and smaller river they were still running in separate channels, but they were no longer dashing their waters among the pointed rocks, but were flowing softly and sweetly on the same level plain, and were rapidly approaching the place of the confluence

of waters, where they would unite without a ripple, and become a mighty river to fertilize the face of the country and bear the gospel on its bosom to foreign lands. The United Associate Synod, as became them from their numbers and respectability, were the first to propose and open up a direct friendly intercourse between the two synods. It was like the letting out of waters. The stream of affection, having once found an outlet, increased till it flowed forth in a gush of love which no one could stop and which none strove to restrain. The wonder at the period of union was how two religious denominations in the same country, and so much akin to each other, or rather all but identical, in doctrine, discipline, worship and government, should have been so long kept separate, and thus have greatly marred the beauty and harmony of the Church of Jesus.

Henceforth the history of the Relief church shall cease under its old designation, but it shall not be terminated. The beautiful Scripture figure as to the church forbids the thought: 'The King's daughter is all glorious; her clothing is of wrought gold,' and the virgins, her companions, follow her with joy as she is conducted as a bride with nuptial splendour into the palace of the illustrious Prince. The aged fathers and matrons who have seen her grow up with such a light step and cheerful face, and who have often rejoiced in her smile and been cheered with her sweet voice, may heave a sigh that her name is to be buried and that she shall no longer have that individual personality which she once had. A single tear may even break forth upon her own cheek,—'forgotten as soon as shed.' The path of nature, reason, and religion is plain. A numerous progeny will speedily rise up to call her blessed. And if not her name—her features, her principles, her virtues shall thus be preserved till distant ages.

I doubt not but that some twinges of sorrow were felt that the Church of Relief should lay aside the designation under which she was cradled and reared, and that sighs were uttered that she should no longer have a distinct name and

place among the churches of Christ. But are not sects and parties an evil? A painful evil in this present imperfect condition. Is not union a duty? It lies near to the heart of Jesus that his church should be one. Unnatural rivalry between the Secession and Relief church has happily ceased. They have won each other's affection. They have pledged themselves to each other in a solemn covenant strong as death. Since the auspicious era, the 13th May 1847, they have been a united church, and the motto upon their ring is *truth* and *love*.

Their revered fathers, now one in glory, shall not be forgotten by them. Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, Wilson, and Moncrieff—Gillespie, Boston, and Colier shall be names to be prized by the united church so long as memory holds her seat. The noble stand which they made for truth and purity, the rights and liberties of the Christian people in their day, shall ever make them men wondered at. But shall their descendants, now one in the hand of God, and taught by their parental lessons, and copying after their example, and drinking deep into their spirit, and living under the enlightened, liberal, and missionary era of the 19th century, not leave behind them a numerous, enlightened, and spiritual progeny, who shall make the name of the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH to be remembered in all generations? 'Instead of the fathers God shall take the children, and make them a praise in the earth.' Adapting to this church what belongs to the church as a whole, and from which our church, if faithful to her Lord, shall not be excluded:

"No more the patriarchs of thy line  
In time's long records chief shall shine;  
Thy greater sons to empire born,  
Its future annals shall adorn.  
Thy power *derived*—to them display,  
And stretch through earth their boundless sway."

THE END.









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